

TWINS AND TRAINS . . . Two sets of twin boys peek over table edge at train display in Topeka department store, presenting a scene that is repeated thousands of times over from one end of the country to the other. Youngsters find Christmas shopping an exciting adventure.

Mistletoe, Prescribed for Kissing Once Thought Cure for Illness

An ancient custom, which "prescribed" mistletoe for the prevention and cure of a wide variety of illnesses — epilepsy, for instance — has given way to the happier idea that mistletoe is the right prescription to assure opportunities for exchanging kisses during the holiday season.

Naturally, this makes mistletoe an object of interest — as it has been for centuries.

Druid priests in early Britain cut mistletoe at the winter solstice and gave sprigs of it to the people. The sprigs were hung above doorways of homes and stables. The Druids taught, and the people believed, that this vine had great power to ward off evil and protect against illnesses.

Despite the early interest in mistletoe for its supposed medicinal qualities, its use as a "prescription for kissing" had a place in the ancient world, too.

Romans and other early peoples considered mistletoe as an emblem of peace. Meeting under it, enemies kissed each other and made a truce until the next day.

Scandinavian myths tell the story of the death of Balder, the sun god, who was, so mythology says, killed by an arrow of mistletoe wood. His mother the goddess Freya, had asked all living things to pledge not to harm her son, but she neglected to ask the lowly mistletoe.

Balder's enemy, the lame god Loki, took advantage of this to make the arrow, which he persuaded Hoder, the blind god of winter, to shoot. Balder died, but through the efforts of all the other gods, he came back to life after three days, and the sun's light shone at the winter solstice.

Freya cried for joy, and her tears became mistletoe berries. She kissed everyone who passed under the mistletoe, and ordained that this same sign of affection should always be exchanged when people met beneath the mistletoe.

Christmas Roses

One of the most beautiful of the legends associated with Christmas is that of the Christmas rose.

According to the story, Madelon, the child of a shepherd, saw the Wise Men pass toward Bethlehem, laden with gifts for the Christ Child, and she wept because she had no gifts to offer.

An angel appeared before her and asked, "Why do you weep?" "Because," Madelon replied, as she brushed away her tears, "I have no gift for the Christ Child."

"A gift of the heart is best of all, but I will give you something to carry to the manger," and with this the angel disappeared, and in the same spot there appeared a beautiful rose, filled with white blooms.

Madelon gathered the blossoms and joyfully went to Bethlehem.

At the manger, she stood in the background as the Wise Men offered their gold, frankincense and myrrh. She hesitated, doubting that her small gift would be acknowledged or appreciated.

Mustering her courage she stepped forth and lay the roses before the Christ Child. Immediately, the flowers turned from white to a most beautiful pink, the first Christmas rose.

Dickens Believed "Chimes" Best

Historians often credit Charles Dickens' immortal "Christmas Carol" as being perhaps the most effective single force behind England's return to the observance of Christmas. Yet, Dickens did not consider it his greatest work, nor was it the best seller during his lifetime.

The most popular of Dickens' stories in his day was "The Cricket on the Hearth," the story of a father who tries to shield his blind daughter from the realities of life. "The Cricket" made its appearance in 1845 and was an immediate success. It sold twice as fast as the now-familiar story of Scrooge and Tiny Tim. Less than a month after "The Cricket" reached bookstands, dramatic versions of it were playing in 12 prominent London theatres.

Despite the immediate success of "The Cricket" and the relative popularity of "Christmas Carol," Dickens did not believe either to be his greatest work. His personal favorite was "The Chimes," which, he told friends "would knock 'the Carol' out of the field."

Dickens, of course, was wrong. "The Chimes" and "The Cricket" have each taken a back seat to "The Christmas Carol," the cheerful Christmas story of Tiny Tim and his friends.

Route to Bethlehem Not Definitely Known

The exact route that Mary and Joseph followed in traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem is not known.

One route led along the seacoast and through the plain of Sharon, but it was shunned by pious travelers as much as possible because of heathen cities and rowdy travelers.

A second route, the shortest, was via the fruitful plains of Esdraelon into the mountains of Samaria and through Schechem and Bethel. Although steep, the road was not too bad. But Jews had little use for Samaritans, and vice versa, so this route most likely was not chosen by Mary and Joseph.

The Jordan route, which descended into the Jordan valley and followed the river around Jericho, was favored by the majority of Galilean travelers. This route, fairly level, was even then steeped in Jewish history.

Whichever the route, Mary and Joseph traveled nearly 100 miles to seek shelter in the lonely stable where the child Jesus was born.

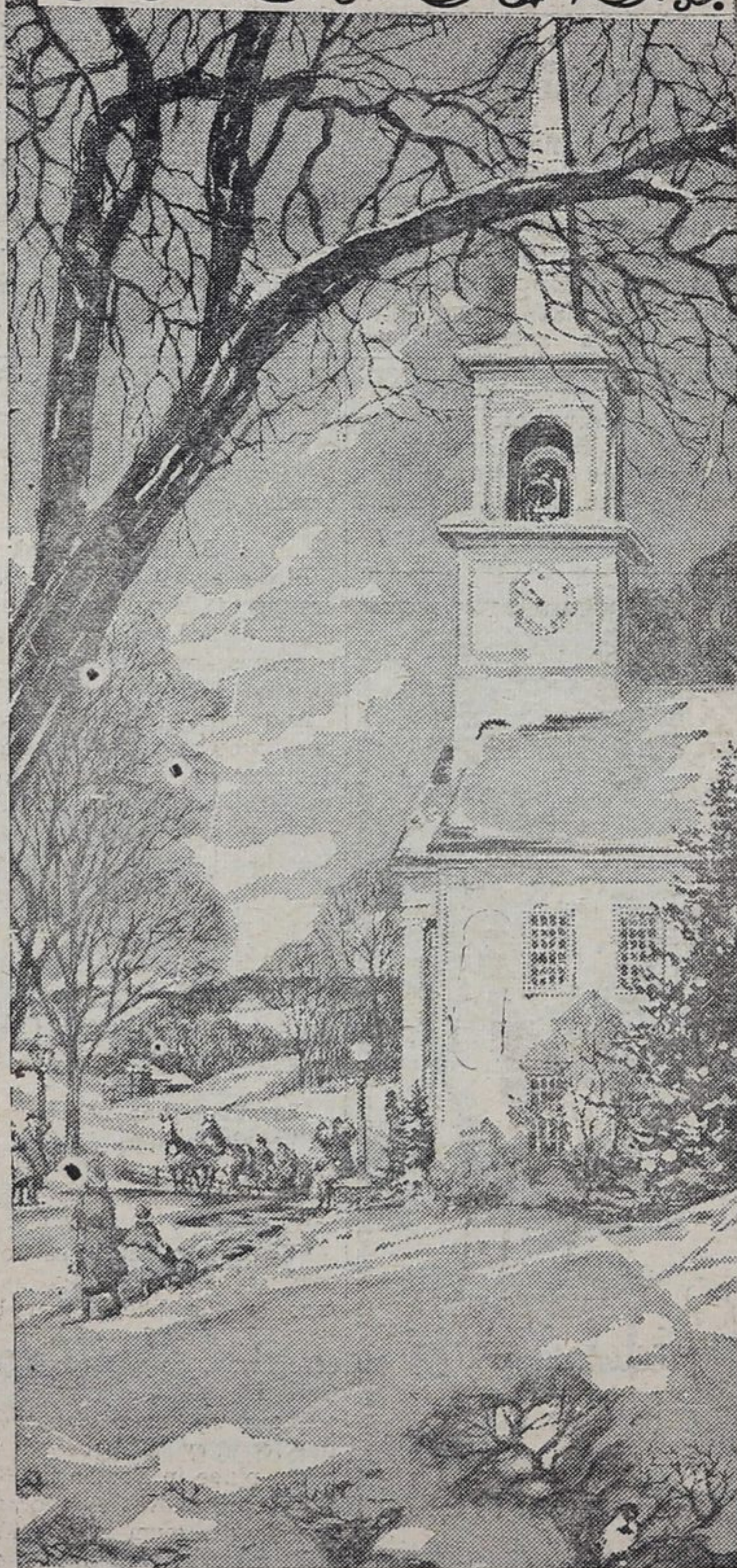


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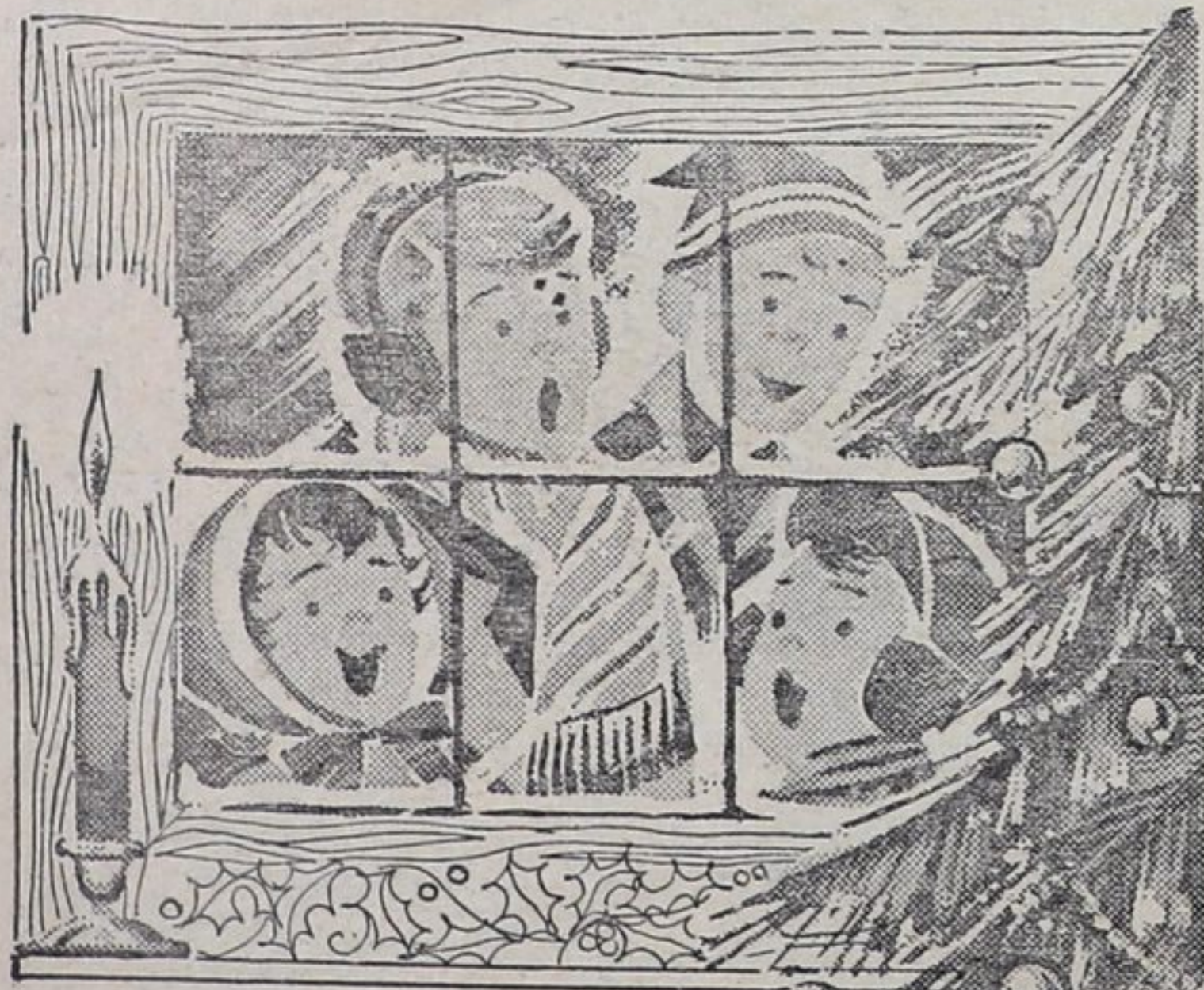
Christmas Greetings



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GREETINGS

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