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**The Little Fir Tree**

By Henry Harding

THERE was very little sunlight in the forest. The trees were so big, all the grown up trees. The little fir tree stretched himself, and tried to imagine himself as full grown. Looking up at the sky and the stars and the moon, he listened to the big trees talk. "Isn't the moon bright tonight," one would say; and there would be a gentle rustling of their leaves as the trees would shake their heads in agreement.

"I'm afraid you're going to be stunted, because there is so much shade here," a little squirrel said to the fir one day as he jumped into its branches and brushed the top limbs with his bushy tail. "It takes sunlight to make anything grow strong and tall."

So the little fir tree stretched himself up, and kept his head pointed up toward the spot of sunlight he saw clear up through the maze of heavy tree growth. He could be straight and upstanding, even if he hadn't grown tall.

Today the ground was all covered with the snow which stayed white in the forest. All but a few birds had gone south. Every once in a while there was the sound of steel striking against wood, and infrequently a crashing sound of falling trees.

"The tall trees began to tremble. The woodcutters are out. But this is a funny time of year," one mur-



"I never saw a more beautiful tree," he said. "It seems to glow."

mured to the others. Then one of the little snow birds spoke. "Have you forgotten that every year they come to cut Christmas trees?"

"What are Christmas trees?" the little fir asked. "Oh, they cut down the trees and take them in the house, and put candles on them so they look like stars, and spangles that look like snow shining in the moonlight. And the people sing songs and give each other gifts, and it is a time of being glad," the little snow bird twittered.

"Oh, I wish they would take me," the little tree cried in excitement. "I'd love to see it all. I'd love to make people happy. But I'm too little," and he sighed unhappily.

"Sh, Let's all be quiet," one of the tall trees exclaimed. "The woodsmen are coming near us. We must be quiet so they won't notice us. Then we won't be cut down and left to die."

But in spite of their silence, the men drew near. They looked at the trees, and one of them said: "Oh, these are all too tall. No house or church could hold them. Let's get on."

Just then a little lad who was riding in the sled, called to his father: "Dad, can we find a little tree for sister? Couldn't we find a cute little tree to put in her very own room?"

"Ho! Ho!" laughed a big rough man. "In her own room? No little girl will stay in her room on Christmas day!"

The lad's father answered, sadly: "Yes, my little girl will. She had infantile paralysis last summer, and hasn't been able to walk since. Surely, son, we'll find a little tree for her."

"Here I am, here I am! come and get me," the little fir tree called out lustily. And the little boy turned and saw the branches trembling, and the little snow bird flying away.

"Why, dad, there is a cute little tree over there. Such a beautiful straight tree. Wouldn't that do?" he called.

The man got out from the sled. He walked to the tree and fondled it gently. "I never saw a more beautiful tree. It seems to glow. Molly will love it," he said with a smile.

The little tree was so happy that he didn't feel the blows from the ax that cut him to the ground. And when they put him into the sled, he was still happy. The little boy called to his father: "It sounds as if the little tree was singing when the wind blows through its branches." And the little tree laughed delightedly.

**Customs That Have Changed**

You'll be giving presents this Christmas. Your house will be decked with holly and mistletoe, there'll be a Christmas tree, and the kids will be hanging up their stockings. Maybe you'll go to church.

Of all these customs, only one has any real connection with Christmas. That is the last-mentioned—and probably least observed. Exchanging presents belongs properly to the New Year. Christmas trees existed long before Christianity. And old Santa Claus is quite out of place at Christmas. His date—St. Nicholas Eve—is really December 5.

In certain countries New Year is still the gift season as it was in the earliest days of Rome. The Romans generally gave figs and dates covered with gold leaf, accompanied by money with which to buy statues of the gods. Mistletoe has really no Christmas significance, for it was the Druids' New Year gift—cut from the sacred trees with a golden knife.

**Cautious Queen**  
 Down through the ages, from B.C. to A.D., New Year remained the time for gifts. Christmas presents were still unknown in the time of Henry III, but New Year presents weren't. In fact, that monarch extorted New Year gifts from his subjects as his right. Queen Elizabeth depended on New Year gifts for her magnificent wardrobe—and it is recorded that she took good care not to give too much back.

Plus and gloves were the most popular presents. At the end of the fifteenth century, women were still using wooden skewers, and welcomed an "expensive" present of pins. Often they received instead money to buy pins themselves—which gave us the expression—"pin money."

**Origin of Trees**  
 Christmas trees were introduced into England from Germany not so long ago—but for their true origin one must go back to ancient Egypt, where palm trees put forth a shoot every month and were of festive significance at the end of the year, because they bore 12 shoots, representing 12 months. New Year again, you see.

Whether or not it was that giving presents to children on December 5, in recognition of the kindly St. Nicholas, the festivities of Christmas, and the exchange of gifts at New Year became too expensive as individual customs, the fact remains that gradually they all became lumped together on Christmas Day.

**THE FARMER AND THE WAR**

"The last war will verify the contention that no part of our population gives more freely of its sons to man the different parts of the active service at the front in time of war than does the farming population. Most farm homes in Canada still call to mind the service given by one or more of its sons or daughters during the last Great War. The ranks of the different services are already manned by a considerable percentage of rural enlistments for this war. In emphasizing the service which the farmer can give through production, I am mindful of the fact that he is common with other Canadians in manning the front line trenches."—Hon. J. G. Gardiner, Dominion Minister of Agriculture in an address to the United Grain Growers at Winnipeg.

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