

Pre-historic Ghosts Walk at Christmas

Legends Behind Festive Scene

By A. J. FORREST

Christmas cheer, a sparkling reality for children and expensive fact for adults, has legend as its foundation. Yet, as the years advance and knowledge grows, this foundation becomes more firmly entrenched in our minds.

Father Christmas himself, the Pere Noel of the French, the rod wielding (naughty - boys - only chastised) Weihnachtsmann of the Germans, and the San Nicolaas of the Dutch, began as a myth. But a fact he remains - to the delight of countless millions of children and parents.

The benevolent old fellow had his beginnings before the Christian era, stemming from Odin, the Norsemen's god. Odin drove his reindeer through the clouds, his whip cracking lightning from the clouds. By some freak of association, this pagan belief became linked with Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, during the heyday of the Roman Emperor Diocletian (A.D. 284 - 305). The gracious bishop, Saint Nicholas, became immortal for his charity. Children loved him because, while they slept, he filled their shoes and stockings with gifts. So, Santa Claus had a worthy ancestry.

Scholars still cannot decide just when he reached England.

We know, however, that he was well established in Medieval Mummerly, the forerunner of the drama in Britain. So, already 600 years back, we were aware of his being and acted the role of Lord Bountiful, although in truth he did not enter his nursery kingdom in the English-speaking world until the Victorian era. Then, through the sprawling genius of Dickens and the serenity of that age which gave men time to occupy themselves with kindly distractions, his appearance at Yuletide quickly won him complete ascendancy over the children's hearts.

MISTLETOE ORIGIN

Mistletoe's place at Christmas stemmed from origins even farther back in prehistoric times. The mistletoe kiss (so pleasing a well-known) once signified the kiss of death. For, as the distinguished anthropologist, Sir James Fraser, notes in his "Golden Bough", mistletoe served our ancient forebears during priestly rites. It was in evidence when, on stone altars under the open skies, finely-built young men and women were sacrificed to tribal gods.

Shakespeare dismissed mistletoe as "baleful". And, at different periods, all kinds of properties were attached to the "golden bough". Men believed it could ward off sorcery and black magic, dispel evil spirits, cure warts and epilepsy, extinguish fires, and even deflect lightning and thunderbolts. Many communities exalted it as an object of fetish worship, a touchstone of fertility, capable of curing barren mothers or precious stock seemingly unable to bear progeny.

The mistletoe clusters, most esteemed by the Druids, were cut with their sacred knives from oak trees. For the oak to be mistletoe's host added to specimen's rarity and, no doubt, to its magic properties. For mistletoe, as a bird-borne parasite, seldom attaches itself to oaks. It grows more easily on soft-barked trees like birches, apples and willows.

Yet, how strange a transformation: to turn the kiss of death into a Yuletide bliss kiss, a token of joy, however momentary! To extract full worth, however, remember to pluck one of the fruits each time you kiss under the bough. And don't forget that when all the fruits are gone, the mistletoe bears no more.

The Yule log, crackling before the hearth, possibly owes its inception to camp fires with skinned cave-dwellers gathered round a roaring blaze after winter's snow encased the land.

CHRISTMAS TREES

We shall never know. Personally, I believe that the Christmas tree, though attributed in Britain to Queen Victoria's husband, the German-born Prince Albert, is rooted in more ancient times.

But few will dispute the German claim as the tree's first modern patrons in Europe. Sentimental, homes and family-loving, they delighted in the evergreen spirit brought by a little fir tree into their homes. Decorated, too, it added to their sense of well-being. With presents piled around its stem, the children found its shining, sparkling magic irresistible.

So, in little more than a century, from a few fir twigs, stuck in pots, the Christmas tree has grown into a universal decoration. Its presence blesses the poorest homes. Or it enchants tens of thousands, when giant specimens glitter with rainbow-coloured lights, bring joy to city squares.

Now, the lack of a "tree" - even just a branch upon which candles flicker - seems alien to the Christmas spirit itself. I know old age grandchildren, with children and grandchildren long vanished overseas, who year by year decorate their little tree.

They spread their silver tinsel over it, and Grandpa, with a word or two of grace and a blurred look in his wrinkled eyes carries a taper in his shaking hand to the tree's small battery of candles. Then the golden memories of the old folks begin to glow.

Again our celebrations would be unthinkable without the Christmas card. But here there's no claim to pre-historic inspiration. And this

Yes, Virginia, There Is A Santa Claus

Is there a Santa Claus? Millions of children have asked that question, since visits from St. Nicholas began to be associated with the observance of Christmas. In 1897, one girl wrote to the editor of the New York Sun, asking him about Santa, and the next day an editorial appeared, an editorial that has been reprinted thousands of times since.

Here is that famous editorial:

The Editorial

We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of The Sun:

Dear Editor—I am 8 years old. Some of my friends say there is no Santa Claus.

Papa says, "If you see it in The Sun, it's so."

Please tell me the truth: is there a Santa Claus?

VIRGINIA O'HANLON,
115 West Ninety-Fifth Street.

Virginia your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe unless they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas, how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childish faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no en-

joyment except in sense and sight. This eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children or men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not. But that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive all the wonders there are unseen

mas fare. Christmas, of course, serves many of us as an excuse for over-eating. It is a season of good foods, vintage wines, sunlit liqueurs and aromatic cigars. Hall all! And of the wholesome foods, the turkey is king of the board.

This proud bird ousted peacock and boar's head, favourite Christmas dishes of earlier ages. And more - he has driven them into oblivion. I can never see him, lying well-stuffed and basted, without recalling those Elizabethan sea captains, fellow traffickers with Drake and Hawkins, who sailed to South America and brought back with them, as offerings to the Old World, penults of wild turkeys as well as gold and silver in their holds.

THE TURKEY

It is now believed that the Spanish navigator, Pedro Nino, was the first European to discover the turkey. He achieved this distinction when, in 1499, he landed on the coast of Cumanu north of Venezuela. Here he bought a number of straggly-legged wild fowls from local Indians at the price of four glass beads a bird. Next year his expedition sailed back to Spain. Records of the voyage, preserved in the Royal Palace at Madrid, do not specify whether he brought back specimens with him.

CHRISTMAS TOYS

Tracing back toys and their Christmas links is not so easy. Again a prehistoric father's uncouth effort in wood, carved with knife, no doubt brought into being some crude abap for the amusement of his cave-children.

Then long before Western civilization began, Chinese families delighted in their kites and spinning tops. Jointed dolls appeared in Egypt at least 1,000 years before the birth of Christ.

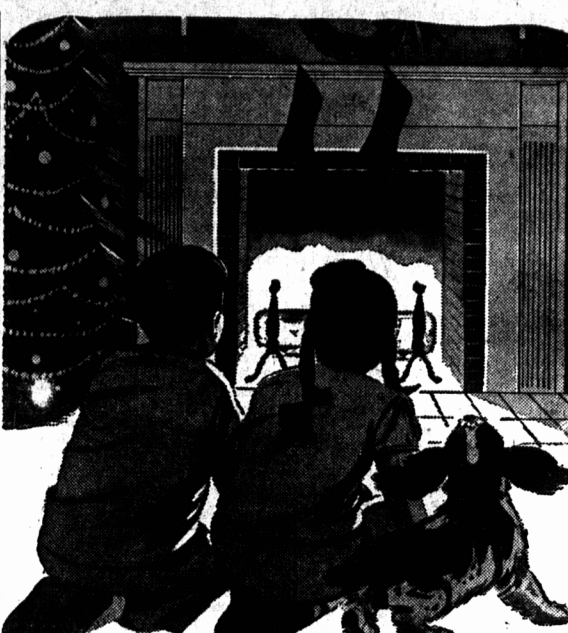
Later, in the 14th century, French courtiers used dolls as fashion models. In 1391, royal couriers from France delivered an exciting parcel to the English queen. Opening it, she discovered a selection of dolls wearing the latest modes of the gay capital.

Some nursery late-comers, although firm favourites for years, must be noted. The golliwog, as far as is known, did not appear until 1815, the year it was brought to life as the hero of a book on "Dutch dolls". Teddy Bears, even more popular, are younger still.

Queen Victoria, as a tiny tot in the 1820's, was the lucky owner of a priceless doll set, 132 specimens in all. The ill-starred Baroness Leichen dressed them for her. So, as the royal little princesses commended, she was attended by a dazzling array of ladies-in-waiting, singers, ballerinas and great dames, all of whom she could transform at will.

Anyone, troubling to explore the eavalcade of Christmas toys down the ages, must be struck by their sense of topicality and reality. While the fury of the French revolution still thundered, toy gullions invaded European nurseries, especially those in France. Then little girls, as befitting good republicans, had great fun (we believe), in striking off the heads of their doll aristocrats.

Today's nursery wonders range from cats which purr to the latest science marvels, real and imaginary. From Flying Saucers, space bins and "atomic disintegrators" down to such workaday devices as hydraulic petrol pumps, inspection lifts, and garages with wash-downs. What next? cry the wondering parents. They know that today's surprise will be cast aside as commonplace to-morrow. And now—Christ-



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Beloved Consort

On Christmas Day 1838, the toast was "The Queen and Her Consort." On that Day, Queen Victoria announced her engagement to her cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, who was to become such a faithful husband and loyal subject. He died a few days before Christmas 1861, and the Queen never ceased to wear mourning for him.

Sad End

Christmas Eve 1247 saw the end of one of the most colourful and romantic characters in legendary history. On that day, according to ancient documents, Robin Hood was assassinated by an abess not far from Sherwood Forest, where he lived the life of an outlaw. If legend is to be believed, Robin Hood, with his band of faithful followers, all well known and well loved by children, displayed the true spirit of Christmas by helping the poor and oppressed.

ON THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Take the Christmas tree, and instead of placing it in the window, put it into a corner. Take your lamp and place this at the base of the tree, so that it is hidden from view by a chair or stool—or perhaps the coal bucket. Fix a green-colour bulb and switch on. Fix a red-colour bulb to your overhead light position and try that effect!

In my own lounge I have a number of electrical points, so that, when required, I can move lights about and create the right atmosphere for the particular type of party. At one party the guests all took part in a comic drama, and for this I turned the ceiling of the room into vivid blue—and the walls were lit with a deep red glow. The lounge became for two hours a real New York nightclub!

CANDLES CAN HELP

Allied to this background of colour lighting, you should make full use of candles. Candles are on the way back in London you can see them on the tables in many of the smart restaurants. Make candles work for you to create that essential spirit of Christmas! Make a test. Listen to a favourite piece of music with ordinary lighting on. Then try colour-lighting the room in the way suggested—and see if you don't enjoy that same piece of music much more!

Now what about curtains? Have you ever tried lighting your curtains with colour? The effect can be very striking, and often it can transform quite an ordinary-looking room into a sheer Aladdin's Cave! If you have a pelmet, it is comparatively simple to rig up two light sockets inside each end, leading the flex down the side, to the nearest power point. If you have no pelmet, a coloured lamp near the base of the curtain (but not too near!) will achieve the same enchanting effect.

FLOWERS PLUS LIGHTING

Flowers, when lit with coloured light, are really beautiful. Now I know that flowers are somewhat expensive at Christmas, but you can get a few chrysanthemums and arrange them in an artistic manner with sprigs of holly. When lit with the appropriate colour... you'll say "Ooh!" and "Aah!" yourself!

The thing to remember when colour-lighting your home is that, as a general rule, red lighting will make red fabric more intense, blue lighting will bring out blue fabrics and so on. So that, if you want to emphasise some particular part of a room light it in the same colour.

BLUE CEILING, RED WALL

Fix, say, the red bulb to your lamp or socket, and place behind it a heavy object in one corner of the room, perhaps behind the armchair, so that the light is reflected from the wall. Next, if you haven't a central light, take out the bulb, attach a two-way switch. Into one socket put a blue bulb, into the other a normal "white" bulb. When you switch-on, you will find you have a blue ceiling and one wall lit up in brilliant red.

If you require normal ceiling lighting, all you need do is reach up and click the two-way switch, bringing in the normal light! Simple—and very effective!

By using two colours at once (red and blue) you can create wonderful ceiling patterns. These are caused by the two-colour shadows of the paper decorations.

SEASONS GREETINGS

In the spirit of friendliness, and good cheer, we thank you for your favours and sincerely wish you a Merry Christmas!

A. Pickard Machinery LIMITED
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Color Light Your Home

By Peter D. Cross

"Now what shall we do that will be really original this Christmas?" How many times have you said that when faced with the problem of parties—and the prospect of receiving the scores of once-a-year well-wishers? When you open the front door will your friends encounter the familiar scene—the Christmas tree in the window with lights round it, the papers streamers across the ceiling, and the sprigs of holly and mistletoe hung in the same places as they were the year before. Or will they find a home that seems to breathe the very joyous spirit of Christmas, a house with a new "coloured-look"?

Now, I'm not saying that we should abandon the usual Christmas trimmings. On the contrary, the Christmas tree is an absolute essential in any house: the holly and mistletoe (particularly the mistletoe) are also vital items. And keep the paper streamers, balloons, bells and what-have-you. Only let's consider how we can arrange them, now we can light them, in a different way.

COLOUR-LIGHTING

That is the secret—light...coloured light.

Light your home in colour this Christmas—and just wait for the "oohs" and "aahs" when your "Yuletide guests arrive! First thing to do is to take a good look round your various rooms—the rooms you usually decorate for Christmas. Consider the lounge, the room where you hold most of your parties. It's more than likely that you have an electric point in the room, probably connecting up a stand or "table lamp. Good! If you haven't a lamp handy, buy a short length of flex (3-core) and a plug and a lamp socket.

Next, obtain three or four coloured bulbs (same size and wattage as the normal "white" lights). At Christmas time these are usually on sale in green, red and blue varieties. If you cannot obtain any coloured bulbs, effective results can be obtained by simply painting a plain "white" bulb with water colour—laid on fairly thickly and allowed to dry normally.

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Merry Christmas

This is the happy occasion on which we extend our good wishes to all our friends — for a season of prosperity, good health and lasting happiness.

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