Story of St. Nicholas—

PATRON SAINT OF CHRISTMAS LIVED ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ IN ASIA MINOR IN FOURTH CENTURY

On Christmas Eve, Canadian children will be tucked snugly in their beds—while visions of toys and sweets dance through their heads. Listening breathlessly, they may hear sleighbells in the snow. Santa will be about, his pack laden with dolls and drums, painted carts and picture books, and unrationed good cheer for young and old.

The real, live St. Nicholas was born in Asia Minor and lived during the Fourth century. The Dutch settlers brought many legends centering around him to this continent. He was an extraordinary studious youth and, after his father died, much concerned about the fortune he had inherited. He therefore, conceived the idea of supplying financially embarrassed maidens with dowries, the young ladies having no idea where the money came from.

In his youth, Nicholas visited the Holy Land, and as a result, desired to spend his life in a monastery. However, he was bidden to "Go on; live among men . . ." Later, as the Archbishop of Myra, he was renowned for his graciousness, kindness and understanding of children.

Feast of St. Nick In Russia

The feast of St. Nicholas, patron saint of Russia, is celebrated on December 6. On that day, in many European countries, the children are visited by St. Nicholas and given nuts, apples, candy and small gifts, providing they have been well behaved throughout the year.

The modern conception of Santa Claus was first expressed by Washington Irving who, in 1809, described him as a tubby, jolly little fellow speeding across the sky in a reindeer-drawn sleigh.

In 1822, using Irving's description and supplying additional details from his own imagination, Clement Clarke Moore told his children the story of "The Visit of St. Nicholas." A year later, the poem was published in the Troy Sentinel. Many years passed however, before Dr. Moore, being a professor of divinity, publicly acknowledged having written the now famous poem, which has been translated into several foreign languages.

Legends dealing with the origin of the use of the Christmas tree go as far back as the Tenth century when George Jacob, the Arabian geographer, declared that all of the trees in the forest blossomed and bore fruit the night of our Lord's Nativity.

It is believed that Jacob's story might have led to the later custom of hanging apples and fruits on the evergreen tree, and, as is the habit in certain parts of Europe, of using a blossoming cherry sapling in the home as a Christmas tree.

One August Imgart introduced the Christmas tree to America 100 years ago in Wooster, Ohio, and, in so doing, preserved the tradition that had been handed down in Germany. In 1851, Rev. Henry C. Schwan, pastor of Zion Lutheran church in Cleveland, Ohio, put up the first Christmas tree in a church in this country, for which he and his parishioners were severely denounced by other congregations.

Beautiful Story of Christmas Tree

One of the most beautiful legends concerning the Christmas tree is the ancient tale dealing with the forester and his household, who had just gathered around the fireside on Christmas Eve when they heard a timid knock on the door.

The forester opened the door to behold a little child shivering on the steps. Touched by the child's cold and apparent exhaustion, the forester took him in, and he was welcomed by the whole family and warmed and fed. Later, the forester's son, Hans, gave up his bed to the little child.

In the morning, the family was awakened by the singing of a choir of angels, and looking at their little guest saw him standing transfigured in their midst. They recognized him as the Christ child. As the Lord Jesus bade the family farewell, He broke off a branch from a fir tree, set it in the earth, and said, "Behold, I have gladly received your kind gifts, and this is my gift to you. Henceforth, this tree shall always bear its fruits at Christmas time and you shall always have abundance."

The first community Christmas tree was set up in Paris, France, in 1840, but was not popularity accepted throughout the world until the advent of electricity, when the lighting could be stabilized and proper effect given to its display.

Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who came to England in 1840 to wed the young Victoria, is credited with bringing the Christmas tree to the British Isles.

SIGNIFICANCE OF XMAS MINCE PIES

The Christmas mince pie had a Christian symbolism in the beginning. The pies represented the gold, frankincense and myrrh brought by the Three Wise Men to the manger; the crust symbolized the gold, and the mixture of spices the frankincense and myrrh. Originally the pies were made oblong and followed the shape of the manger.

There was a superstition that there was no luck in store for the man or woman who did not eat a pie at Christmas. To eat one, it was believed, was to be sure of having at least one happy month. To enjoy a year of happiness, a person had to eat one pie on each of the twelve days after Christmas.

REINDEER FIGURE IN NORTH XMAS

Reindeer figure often in northern myth and folklore. One version of the legend is of Wayland the smith. Wayland and his two brothers leave Finland for the south on their reindeer-drawn sleighs. The mountain elves try to stop them and Wayland's brothers lash their reindeer to force them by the elves. Angry because the three are deserting their homes, but even more because of the blows given the patient deer, the elves curse the two brothers, singing:

"Because Slagfid struck his reindeer
Because Eigel struck his reindeer
Our hatred shall follow you."

Wayland they also curse for leaving Finland, but because "he struck not his reindeer" the curse is milder. The two brothers die violently and tragically, but Wayland, after many troubles, wins back the wife he had lost and becomes the "Smith of the Gods"

SEVERAL SANTAS

There are several Santas, including Kris Kringle and St. Nick or Nicholas. The original St. Nick was a bishop who is said to have lived to take part in the hsitoric Council of Nice. This is disputed by historians, but he certainly lived prior to the reign of Justinian, in whose time several churches in Constantinople were dedicated to St Nicholas.

HUGE YULE LOG WARDED OFF EVIL

Centuries ago huge fires were built in the great baronial halls in England on Christmas Eve and servants brought in a log that was to burn throughout the Christmas feasting. It was customary to save a brand from each year's fire to light the next one. If the log was properly burned it was believed that the devil was powerless to do any mischief to the household.

One story has it that stockings were originally hung by fireplaces to absorb the odor of the burning wood and thus give the wearer protection from evil.

BRITISH SANTA

Father Christmas is the British for Santa Claus.

HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Child choristers once again herald the Christmas season with the lovely carols of long ago. Here children of a church make an impressive picture when viewed through a huge Christmas wreath.

King For Night At Wassail Fete

"Here's to thee
Old apple tree.
Whence thou mayst bud,
And whence thy mayst blow,
And whence thy mayst beat
Apples enow;
Hats full,
Caps full,
Bushels, bushels, sacks full,
And my pockets full too!
Huzza! Huzza!"

The rendering of this doggerel rhyme, followed by the passing of the cider jug, was a popular feature of Christmas during the middle 19th century at Devonshire.

This completed, the male members of the party discharged guns into a selected apple tree—said to result in bumper apple crops.

The men would then knock at the farmhouse door, guess as to the kind of roast in the oven. The one who guessed correctly was king for the night.

OLD CUSTOM

Christmas caroling was a thriving custom in England of the fourth century.

YULE LOG

From pagan Scandinavian worship of Thor comes the Yule log, lighted with a brand from last year's log.

HOW STOCKING CUSTOM WAS COMMENCED

The stocking custom is said to have started with St. Nicholas, original of Santa Claus, a Greek bishop, Nicholas of Myra, who lived in the fourth century. He was both generous and shy and hated to be thanked for the presents he was continually making to those in need.

Once he climbed to a roof and dropped a purse of gold down the chimney so that he would not be seen. The purse instead of falling in the fireplace lodged in a child's stocking that had been hung up to dry on the mantelpiece.

His act became known, and thereafter whenever unexpected gifts came from unknown sources they were attributed to St. Nicholas

IN DANCE MEASURE

Christmas carols were in dance measure at first. The word carol comes from "corolla," a ring, because the song was for a ring dance.

THEME CHANGES

The Nativity theme in Christmas carols gave way to the sentiment: "Bring us in good ale,

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Our warm wish is that your Christmas will be Happy and that a Good New Year will follow.

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