



The Legend ^{Of The} First Christmas Tree

THE CHRISTMAS NEWS \$25.00 PRIZE POEM.

FROZEN and drear was the forest, the widestretching dark German forest,
Vistas of white Gothic arches the snow-laden branches displayed,
Peril of wolf and of bear, or of tribesman more cruel than either,
Menaced the foot-weary band on the road the old Romans had made.

Eve of the birth of the Christ-child, with safety and peace left behind them,
Onward they pressed, for the daylight was rapidly fading away,
Winfried, Apostle of Germany; princely young Gregor his comrade;
Followed by less than a score to protect them from harm on the way.

"Here let us rest," said young Gregor, "even the horses are weary,
Dark grows the road through the forest, left by the fast-setting sun."
"Courage, my comrade!" said Winfried, "soon will the moon shine above us,
Nor must we pause in our journey until all our errand is done.

"Yonder where opens the glade and the forest is red with the firelight,
Under the thunder-oak's shade are the altar and hammer of Thor;
This is the Yuletide, and thither the heathen have gathered to worship,
Practicing bloodthirsty rites that incite them to carnage and war."

Leaving the sledge in the shadows with two trusty followers guarding,
Winfried and Gregor led onward to where in a vast semicircle,
Stood a great concourse of people, all facing their priest at the altar,
While in the rear was the thunder-oak carved in glow of the firelight.
Loudly was Hunrad declaiming, enforcing with gesticulation,
"This is the death-night," cried he, "of the Sun-god, the beautiful Baldur,
Therefore the gods are all grieving; but Thor with this people is angry;
Ye have neglected his altar, and thirsty for blood is his oak-tree;
Therefore the Slaves and the Winds can defeat you—the wild beasts devour you—
Therefore your harvests have failed, and the plague enters into your dwellings."
Then did he pause, while the people—their voices all blended in chanting—
Sang as with fear of impending disaster their song penitential—

"O Thor, thou mighty one!
Strong son of Odhin,
Weild not thy hammer
On us defenseless;
Blood will we give to thee,
Bathing thy thunder-oak,
Steeds that are fleetest—
Best of our flocks and herds
Sacrifice to thee."

Then as the cadences ended, Winfried approaching, unnoticed,
Called to them loudly in greeting—"Hail to ye! sons of the forest!"
Swiftly a thousand eyes turned, and making a path through the middle,
Silent, the vast semicircle divided, then closed on the strangers.
"Who are you? Whence do you come, and what seek you?" said Hunrad advancing;
"Kinsman am I, giving greeting to you of the brotherhood German,
Servant am I of the All-Father, bringing unto you a message."
"Welcome, then kinsman!" said Hunrad, "some miracle now be thy token."
"Nay," answered Winfried, "no power the All-Father giveth unto me,
Save that he gives common man, so no miracle now can I show thee."
"Stand then aside, common man," uttered Hunrad with attitude scornful;
But to the multitude speaking—"None of the gifts that ye offer
Thor, mighty Thor, will count worthy, nor ought but your best and your dearest."
Then moving near where the children were watching the sparks upward darting,

Written
by
Mrs. Amelia
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Laying his hand upon Bernhard, the first-born of Gundhar the chieftain,
"Here is the gift he has chosen; your darling, your best and your dearest."
Then from the people arose a great sigh like the wind in the pine trees,
While the boy—led by old Hunrad—drew near to the stone by the altar.
"Harken, Bernhard!" said the priest, "Soon a message must go to Valhalla,
Say, wilt thou carry it now to the place where Thor dwells with his heroes?"
"Yes," quickly answered the boy, "I will hasten, for I can run swiftly."
Then while he knelt near the altar, blindfolded, the priest raised the hammer—
Poised it above the fair tresses—when Irma the mother came shrieking
"Me, not Bernhard!" but more swiftly came Winfried the child to deliver;
Raising his strong oaken staff and insignia of faith cross-mounted
Stoutly he thrust, and the hammer was shattered on edge of the altar,
"Brothers!" said Winfried, "Why serve you a god who is helpless to aid you?
Even his tree he protects not." And facing his comrade Prince Gregor,
Each with his axe struck the oak-tree while Hunrad to Thor cried for vengeance,
"Tree-god!" said Winfried, "Art angry? We reck not for thus do we smite thee."
"Tree-god!" cried Gregor, "Art angry? We fear not and thus do we fight thee."
Then through the stillness of night came the sound of a mighty wind rushing,
As it once came to the men who assembled on day Pentecostal;
Gripping the oak by its branches—uprooted—it shivered and toppled
Backward with crashes and groans, as it split in four pieces asunder,
While in the midst of its ruins the people beheld a young fir-tree,
Comely and pleasant and green, with its head pointing up to the starlight.

Conflicting thoughts and words now made
Confusion in that forest glade,
As, when a swiftly rushing tide
That dashes down a mountain side
Beats, in its headlong, mad career
On rocky barriers, bold and sheer.
Then Gundhar, striking with his spear,
Said, "All are speaking. Let us hear
The stranger. We his cause will try
And whether he shall live or die."
Then Winfried—drawing from his breast
A scroll—the waiting throng addressed,
"It is the magic tongue," they said,
The Roman, by all wise men read."
And straightway he interpreted.

"The Bishop from his throne in Rome
To those who make the woods their home,
Thuringians, Saxons, Hessians, all
Upon whose ears these words shall fall:
We send you one who seeks no gain,
Except to save you from the stain
Of cruel worship, teaching how
In purer, kinder faith to bow."

"Then tell us," Gundhar said, "What rite
To use this sacrificial night?"
"No more, my brother," Winfried said,
"Shall human blood for Thor be shed.
Nor blood of beast, for Thor is dead.
But take this little fir-tree green
That stands where once his oak was seen

And place it in your home tonight
In peace and love as Yuletide rite.
See how its branches reaching high—
Point from the earth up to the sky;
And evergreen, may fitly be
A sign of immortality."
So then they took the little tree
To where beyond the glade,
The team was left, and on the sledge
It carefully was laid;
The horses tossed their heads, as though
Their load was lighter made.
And in the hall they set it up
With candles gleaming bright,
And Winfried stood and told about
The first glad Christmas night,
The Shepherds, and the young Christ-child,
And host of Angels white.

"And little Bernhard, who had dozed
Upon his mother's knee,
Roused up and said "The angels white
Are singing now to me!"
But it was Gregor and the men
Who thus beside the tree,—

Sang, "Glory be to God on high,
And on the earth be Peace,
Let bitter hate and angry strife
And cruel bloodshed cease,
And Charity and right Goodwill
Begin and never cease."

Christmas Time at Home

By JOE CONE

Oh, Christmas in the country, that is what I like the best,
Down on the farm with Pa and Ma and Nell and all the rest
The dog and cats, the gentle stock, the sunshine and the snow,
The old brown house, the roomy farm, the place I like to go.
No massive trees are bending low with presents large and dear,
No music up in "G" beyond the common people's ear;
Just Christmas time at home, you know, devoid of pomp and show—
The good old fashioned Christmas time of forty years ago.

A row of stockings hung around the fireplace broad and black;
A pantry filled with Christmas pies that cause your lips to smack;
The parlor tree for little folks, molasses candy sweet,
And nuts, popcorn and apples all a fellow wants to eat.
Oh, Christmas time at home for me, the parlor organ there,
With Nell to play the good old hymns and songs so sweet and rare;
The Christmas spirit best of all, let others stray and roam,
For me the farm and country folk and Christmas time at home.



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