



Coming Home For Christmas

They are coming home for the Christmas time,

From the places wide apart;
Old songs we'll sing till the echoes ring,

While the heart speaks unto heart.
So, ho for the joyous Christmas cheer
Surrounding the yule log's glow!
We'll live old days in the ruddy blaze
As the glad hours come and go.

They are coming home for the Christmas time—

That chair in the corner here,
Though badly marred and by Time's hand scarred,

We'll keep for sister dear.
In years ago it was there she sat
To study her lessons o'er;
And now we wait with our hearts elate—

She's coming back home once more.

They are coming home for the Christmas time—

That chair in the corner dim
The brother bore in the days of yore;
That one we'll keep for him.

Just there where the flickering shadows fall
And glints of the embers play,
He dreamed life's dreams in the embers' gleams

Ere he 'rose and went his way.

They are coming home for the Christmas time!

The quaint old armchair low
Will face the light of the yule-log bright

In the sheen of its ruddy glow.
And the father's face will again light up

At the old home circle's call;
And he will pray at the close of day
For blessings of God on all.

They are coming home for the Christmas time!

But the best loved one's not there.
And a silence falls through the old home's halls

As we stand by her fav'rite chair.
They are coming home for the Christmas time,

And, O that the mother's face
Could greet each one as the day was done

From the old accustomed place.

Old-Time Christmas Days

The finest fruit
That eyes e'er see
Is the fruit that grows
On the Christmas tree.

Of course you can not remember your first Christmas, so let your mind go back to the first Christmas you can remember. You were about four years old—although some people claim they can remember when they were three years old, and now and then we strike one of those elastic-minded people who claim they can remember things that happened to them when they were two years old. When we meet such we smile politely and keep our real thoughts to ourselves.

But most of us, perhaps all, can remember the fourth Christmas that passed over our heads. The compiler of this department has a very clear recollection of his fourth Christmas, although it was more years ago than he cares to think about. It was in a little town down in Egypt. Not the Egypt watered by the overflow of the Nile, but the Egypt too often watered by the overflow of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Of course you know

the Egypt referred to is southern Illinois.

The fruit is fine
As fine can be
That hangs upon
The Christmas tree.

It was the Christmas of '67, and the country was still suffering the immediate effects of a long warfare. Thousands of homes were homes of mourning, and the Christmas day of that year was a day of tears and heartaches for wives and mothers all over the broad land. But there were countless little children for whom war had no meaning, and these little ones had to have Christmas joy, no matter how sadly heartstrings were wrenched. It was on this particular Christmas day that the compiler of this department had his first Christmas tree.

He can see it yet. A bit of stunted evergreen, trimmed with popcorn strung on thread, a few red cranberries similarly fixed, a few bits of tallow candles and some old newspapers cut into narrow strips and curled by being drawn quickly over the edge of a knife. But it was the prettiest Christmas tree that ever grew, and it bore finer fruit than any that ever graced a tree in the Garden of Eden.

O wondrous joy
For you and me
Is borne upon
The Christmas tree.

"Store candy" was a luxury not to be dreamed of in those days. But Christmas without candy is not Christmas. So the good mother secured a bit of old-fashioned New Orleans sugar, and out of it she manufactured some candy and moulded it into fantastic shapes. Ever eat any candy made out of that kind of sugar? Yellow, sticky, and "smearable" without limit. There must have been a couple of pounds of it upon this particular Christmas tree. Nothing half so good in the way of candy has ever fallen to the lot of the writer.

But joy of joys. In addition to the candy, this Christmas tree had wonderful fruit in the shape of the first pair of pants that ever encased the underpinning of the grey-haired boy who writes these lines. They were blue pants, not from choice but from necessity. The cloth was not new. Far from it. It had seen some hard service, for it was once contained in the overcoat of a father who had worn it through field and swamp, in bivouac and camp. He brought it home with him, badly worn and torn, but still an overcoat. You older readers will remember how many years after the war closed that the veterans wore those old blue overcoats. When this particular overcoat was about "all in," as the boys say, and no longer wearable by the father, the mother took it in hand, and with infinite skill and patience and a bit of legerdemain that would put a Herman to shame, changed it into the finest pair of pants a boy ever donned.

Go where you will,
You must agree
The best of all
Is the Christmas tree.

There was a tiny flag on that Christmas tree, too. It was the prettiest flag ever manufactured, and the writer would give a great deal if he had it today. He has since seen thousands of bigger, and more expensive flags, but not one of them equalled the tiny flag

that graced the top of that Christmas tree on December 25, 1867.

It was only a flag on one side. Lack of material, and not lack of time, was responsible for it being only a flag on one side. The good mother managed to secure a few bits of red and blue flannel. She also found a bit of white goods. There was material for a flag, and she used it. She sewed red flannel on for stripes, and a square of blue flannel served for the field. Some little scraps of white goods served for the stars, and there was a flag good enough for any boy. It was fastened to the very topmost branch of that wonderful Christmas tree, and it looked bigger and brighter than any flag that has since then waved where the writer could see. For upwards of thirty years that little flag was treasured, and then it suddenly disappeared. What became of it no one knows, although the writer would give a month's salary to recover it.

In every clime,
On land or sea,
In glory blooms
The Christmas tree.

Of course there was a jumping-jack on that Christmas tree. It was a home-made toy, but it was received with shouts of delight. The hands that made it were cold in death before another Christmas passed. It was a nimble jumping-jack, clothed in a suit of red paint. No, it wasn't red paint, it was elderberry juice, or pokeberry juice, one or the other. But no matter about that. It was carved out by the hands of the man who had fought and marched alongside the father whose old army overcoat had furnished a boy with his first pair of pants, and although the writer lives far past the allotted four score years and ten he will never forget Cyrus Rush, whose skill with the jack knife was not less than his skill as a story teller whose tales could hold children in a magic spell.

A few apples, some hickory nuts, some doughnuts and a ball made by raveling out a yarn stocking—these with the things aforementioned made up the sum total of what appeared on that Christmas tree just thirty-seven years ago next Sunday.

Come, gather round
In joy and glee
And gather fruit
From the Christmas tree.

Ten years later there was another Christmas tree to be remembered. It was bigger, bore more fruit and was far finer in appearance, and it was in a church. The superintendent of the Sunday school presided, and as the presents were taken from the tree he read the names, and the owner of the name came forward, always eagerly, usually bashfully, and took the gift. There were several gifts bearing the writer's name, but there was one in particular. It was from her! It was a little autograph album, and that little book seized the one to whom it was given and dragged him into about a dozen fights with his playmates. She had, in her innocence, written the name of the recipient on the inside of the book, instead of on a tag, and below the name she had written:

"If you love me as I love you
No knife can cut our love in two."

Below it she signed her name. What name? That's telling. But the superintendent read the whole thing, and an embarrassed boy stumbled forward amidst shouts of laughter to receive his present. There was no school the next week, but that embarrassed boy managed to get mixed up with two or three schoolmates a day on account of that Christmas present, and the chief satisfaction he has to this day is in the knowledge that he was not the only one who left those little sessions with a somewhat bunged up eye and a rather crimson nose.

She who wrote in the autograph al-

bum is still alive, and has grown up children of her own. Giver and receiver have not met for a score of years, but the memory of those good days nearly thirty years in the past is worth treasuring up.

If I were rich
As rich could be
Each child would have
A Christmas tree.

Eight years later still there was no Christmas tree in sight. The room was rather scantily furnished wherein the writer lay. There was little of Christmas cheer. A white-robed nurse wore a sprig of holly on her breast, and a bunch of flowers from some loyal comrades nodded from the little table at the head of the bed whereon the writer lay, trying to believe that he was going to get well and meeting with poor success. He had about everything he wanted, the trouble being that he didn't have ambition enough to want anything. When a fellow is cut off from home and friends and comrades by a strict quarantine, and looked upon much as the Jews in olden days must have looked upon a leper, he isn't very apt to think about Christmas toys and Christmas joys—especially if his temperature is about 106 and he is seeing things never described in books. This particular Christmas day was spent in a pest house—horrible word, that—wrestling with a case of smallpox that was determined to come off winner. It was a sharp contrast with the Christmas days mentioned before.

How awful mean
That man must be
Who will not plant
A Christmas tree.

But a man never knows what Christmas really means until he has little ones of his own and is privileged to hear them laugh and shout in an abandon of joy when they are led into the front room in the gray dawning of Christmas morn and behold the wonderful tree standing in all its glory.

There's more music in that than there is in all the orchestras ever organized. What better music could you ask up yonder above the blue than a chorus of children laughing in pure joy?

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Burlington Bulletin.

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