BOB-FOR-SHORT'S Christmas

by Louise Dunham Gulesberry

NOW, our baby had never encountered a locked door. The lovesome pitt-pat of his baby feet was herald at whose coming every door in the house swung open and over threshold he was welcomed as he comes.

But we were planning a tree. And the library door was locked.

He paused in his ascent of the stairs to bend his knee in a button that would not stay buttoned. It required much time and he sat down on the step and with all his ten fat, wee fingers labored. Then, "Dus a doodle boy," he objurgated himself as he resumed his climb of the stairs, the button buttoned; "Dus a darlyn' litt' gentleman!"

He shook the knob. Waited, listening on the toes of him and discours'ng to Nicodemus.

The door remained closed.

Two fat palms smote it wrathfully. "Open," he commanded; "pease open dis door."

Nobody answered.

"P'ease, Mr. Boy," he wheedled at keyhole; "here ain't nobody loves 'im."

Nicodemus yapped and made feints at desertion when a dog barked outside. Pawed back, and licked the fingers where bread and honey aroma lingered. Sat up and waved an affable paw at him.

He sat down on the floor and gathered his yellow dog into his pinafore and hugged.

"Cept Nicodemus ain' mysaf," he said.

Great-grand came up the hall.

"Is you been a bad boy, great-dran'" he said. "Is you all shutted out?"

Great-grand shaked.

"Seems like this horse just will run away," he doleful'ness; "and I've got a bone in my foot and I can't run after him."

In a wink he was after the rampant steed. Captured and mounted, rode it hoddy hither and yon, and when at last he came back from the breakfast-nines we had slipped down the back way and at stairfoot waited.

Slowly, with dignity, he dismounted, but his steed in stall, came back to stair-head, and, legs astride and head thrown back, surveyed us from the heights of remembered injury. Beside him, parky, tongue lolling out, Nicodemus squatted.

Long legs gathered to his chin, great-grand raised himself on the top step and twinkled.

"Yes, sir'ee," quoth great-grand; "shutted us all out!"

Our baby nodded confirmation and Nicodemus yawned in our faces.

"He's mye Nicodemus an' mye dreadran," he said. "An now dreadran is dot a bone in his foot an' I needed to kiss mye murver."

But for three long days the library door remained locked.

And regularly, after each morning's breakfast, he mounted the stairs and tried the knob and rattled the Nicodemus, and poked broom straws under the door.

Christmas eve we sat about a great open fire. Great-grand loved to dig and delve in the red-hearted logs and imprison the swarms of rosy bees. Fascinated, I would watch the swirling upled sparks, wondering what phantasms of youth he saw all-beautiful in them, what faces we sent in that rosy mirage that his own should wear so tender an answering look into eyes he alone was seeing. Sometimes our baby would come to stand between his knees, head leaned against his shoulder, and from within the encircling arms watch. Sometimes he would straddle one old knee and snug his head under the down-leaning old chin, gold hair and white hair commingled, and hand over the old hand, help the poker that prodded and piled the embers. And the wide eyes seemed to be seeing with the old man's vision-ing, so unlited he would sit.

Christmas eve we sat about the great open fireplace. Great-grand sorted and piled his red-charred logs. Grandmother was watching, lost in idleness. Grand father had gone down cellar for apples and in my lap my baby was telling me secrets. We listened beyond the singings of the flames; beyond the delicate soft sighing and the sighing and the laughters of them, the wind in the chimney. From the end of the new back-log the sage dattilled, all the summer's rains and dews and green growings in their whicker-whicker. We had hated to shut out the skies, so divinely near they closed in upon earth, with their starry strands garlanding the tin of hills. Our baby had seen his first meteor—a feathered trail of ethereal fire and a soundless spielder as the meteor burst and biggened into a globe of shyalan azure, and went out. And the black violet skies seemed yet deeplier black with that blue glory memoried against them, and the stars pallid and cold. And my baby wondered if there might not be another Christmas baby, in that blue glory. He wondered whether, if we'd go out, we might not find a few boys and girls and babies that not left over, when God forgot who had asked to have some left at their houses. He wished he'd been there that night at the inn's inn, to see the little child. He's he could have brought it home to his own sen's house. He wanted a baby so bad. And even his sweets-freighted baby pocket was bare as sky-sanitary and wondered about it. And his eyes were wide and fathomlessly sweet in the firelight, and his hand clung all the while to my face and neared it, and wove heavenly weave into my life in every least little touches of it to my lips, my cheeks, and in the earnings home of it to slip into my bosom and there rest.

Then we told him that it was going to be the Christmas baby's birthday tomorrow, and because we so love God's little son we give, year after year, his long gifts to him and his cousin other on that day. And the library door tomorrow would be unlocked, and a surprise inside for us each and all.

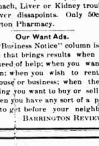
"Dreadran'" was his sole comment; and slowly the happy eyes slipped from us behind their curved-in-fringe, the little warm body lay heavy in my arms. Slowly Great-grand unbuttoned the house of red embers, and reaning over took the little sleeper into his arms, rocked and crooned and croodled and God-blessed him. And with grandmother's kisses on the wee feet that never were still save in slumber, and grandfather's proud look into the unwaiting face following after, I bore him away to his crib, so loved, so loved!

"Is Trismus tum?"

I wakened with the words breaking the crystal of my dreams and kissing themselves against my lips and a fat white body embranced my head.

"Yes, sir." I managed to say through the stranging arms of him. "Merry Christmas, Bob-for-Short!"

"Happy Christmas, Bob-for-Short!" echoed from the doorway; and "Happ-



He Had Never Owned a Kitten.

py Christmas, Bob-for-Short!" floated in from beyond the east and west shoulders of great-grand.

He shouted. He danced. Never before had he been met in all the family at crib-side. He flagged all over the bed, trickling blarneyments and laughters at the three grave faces and wriggled in unconscious tune to the prattings of him.

Then, all his yellow body apant with haste, Nicodemus hoofled his fat self up the stairs into the fun he was missing, and in his wake, Katy from her kitchen.

And with a "Happy Christmas to yez, Mister Bob-for-Short," she set down a kitten on the floor.

We were all very still, as he slipped from the bed and approached the kitten. He had never owned a kitten. He eyed it in captured silence. "Meow" said the kitten.

Into his cheeks the red crimsoned. "Oh!" he gasped. "Dad you tall, titty; pease wad you tall!" And she wagged her tail obediently and arched her back against his foot and cajoled him, and as he gathered her into his skirtfront and a white fat bare legs ran with their treasure, she broke into loud silken purrings. And Nicodemus sulked and fell into a helpless yellow bunch of protest, when the gray kitten was held to his nose for a kiss.

And we all dawdled until Katy's bell rang third summons to breakfast.

He went up the stairs alone. Then Nicodemus. Then great-grand. Then I. And then the rest of his adorers.

He stopped at the door.

"Open the door, sir," said grandfather.

"Tom on, murver," he said, reaching hand into my hand.

So we stepped over the threshold together.

The room was darkened. The firelight dulled behind a screen. In the center of the room a low, fair-branched young cedar tree gleamed like a great jewel.

My hand forgotten, he circled the tree.

"Round and round. And we after.

"Dus a me' beutiful dum," caught the murmur as he inventoried "Dus a little tend horse." He paused to fog it out in ecstasy watch its tail go up and down. "Dus a little toad. Dad to dad bid marble. How you s'pose it dot in?" He turned to inventorize, and set in rolling for that kitten to chase. Nicodemus thought it was meant for him, and when, disappointed with the kitten, he turned and seared and muttering, he fled to a dim tance and sulked in hall and kitchen.

And the inventory went on. "Dus a dold wathe, ribs over Dreadran's dee." He tarried to hunt a pocket, and deposit his watch therein. But first he had to tie on. And the murmur resumed. "But wathe is dot an' dum, too. Dus a pitchel dold." Afterward, supping arbons at the Hotel de Parle, and receiving a present from the monster tree.—William Le Queux.

Christmas in Odd Corners

Tuleide Recollections of a Traveler

THAT has been my lot to spend many of my Christmases in foreign lands. I recall one dismal holiday spent in a filthy post-house on the Volga at Port Ural at Nijni Udinsk, now, in these days of the trans-Siberian railway, a place of some importance.

I was alone, on my way from Peterburg to Irkutsk. On the previous day I had overtaken a convoy of prisoners in chains, and as on the morning of the Russian Christmas day I was sitting in the high-brick stove, I saw the Cossacks and they despairing charges arrive.

I remember walking and talking with several of them in that wilderness of newly fallen snow. Most of them were, or said they were, victims of the unscrupulous agents provocateur of the government, and all seemed bitter against the czar and his advisers—as indeed they well might be.

Another Christmas of the Greek calendar I spent in Servia—in Belgrade, the capital of that gallant little state, the powder-magazine of the Balkans. It was a cold, bright, sunny day, and an air of festivity was everywhere. The service in the cathedral, attended by the king and his cabinet, was a brilliant affair. And after a stroll in the delightful Kalemegdan garden, overlooking the Danube, I lunched with my friend the minister of justice and his charming American wife. The streets were hung with flags, exchanges of presents and flowers were universal, and many were the quaint Serb customs.

The twenty-fifth of December three years ago I spent very quietly in the study restaurant car of the Nord express between Paris and Petersburg. Again, I was alone and I remember, as we steamed out of Vilna station in the great plain towards Dunaburg, the chef of that celebrated express produced his triumph—an English pud-

ding, with a small piece of holly stuck in the top. My fellow passengers, being all foreigners, failed to appreciate it. But I did.

Another memorable holiday was that I passed in the reindeer-skin hut of a Laplander half-way between Alexandrovsk and Kandalaksha. I was travelling by sled. I had left Kirkenaes, on an arm of the Arctic ocean, a month before and was now working my way south toward Archangel.

I profited a bottle of much-shaken port wine, in honor of the occasion, and poured out a glass for my host. He was very suspicious of it, and compelled me to swallow mine first. Then he tipped his, and pulled a very face. His wife tasted it, and sniffed suspiciously, and afterward the servants, but all declared it was some horrid English decoction—some medicine, it must be, they said. They had never before tasted wine. They had never seen a bunch of grapes, never a rose, and never even a tree.

One Yuletide dinner I ate at Crock at Monte Carlo, where the fooling was fast and furious, and with my friends I watched the "Midnight Mass" afterward, supping arbons at the Hotel de Paris, and receiving a present from the

monster tree.—William Le Queux.

Saves an Iowa Man's Life

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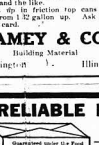
CHRISTMAS AND MISTLETOE

Nature Worship Reflected in Use of Mistletoe at Christmas Time.

A great many years ago, before the time of Christianity, the oak tree, and especially the mistletoe, growing out of the heart of the oak, were reverenced for their supposed affinity with the sun. The Druids worshiped the sun as the one supreme god, and believed the oak to be in some way associated with the sun because they made fire by rubbing oak sticks together, the oak being at once the most common tree and the most suitable for the purpose. Twice each year these Celtic priests gave a religious festival in honor of the sun, their places of worship being in the oak groves. In June, when the sun was known to have ceased ascending higher in the heavens, the Druids gave thanks, because a nearer approach of the sun was thought to be possible, and this, of course, would result in the burning up of the earth. In December, at the time of the shortest days, the Druids prepared a celebration in honor of the sun's turning back from its downward journey, which was recognized as the days began to grow longer. This second celebration was quite naturally the happiest time, the people holding the sun in such fear and awe. It was then the mistletoe was honored as being the very essence of the oak.

When eventually the church was established and its followers turned the ancient December celebration into Christmas, the mistletoe was hung up by way of compromise, although it had nothing to do with the new religion. And so even today, in our use of evergreen and holly, and eke the occasional sprig of mistletoe, we reflect the nature worship which gave us, perhaps, not only the foundation of our Christmas, but for our love of nature as well.



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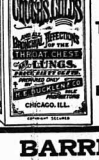

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