

# • New Machines and Gadgets •

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**TABLE CIGARETTE LIGHTER** is in the form of a knight in carefully detailed Earl of Pembroke armor. When the visor is pressed, the helmet snaps open, revealing the flame. Made of sturdy, chrome finished metal, the lighter stands eight inches tall.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1959

**COLLAPSIBLE CANDELABRA** is made of sturdy wrought iron and can hold six candles. It stands 6¼ inches high and comes in satin black or solid white. It has an extended length of about 30 inches, but may be folded into any desired shape.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1959

**CHRISTMAS CARD TREE** of green plastic stands one foot high and has a gold base with a large gold star on top. It has four vertical rows of half-inch slots. As each Christmas card is received, it can be inserted in one of the slots. The tree, which folds flat for storage, thus serves as a revolving card display accommodating up to 50 cards.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1959

**CHILD'S HOSTESS TEA SET**, shown in the photograph, consists of a 45-piece plastic service for six, including plates, cups and saucers, decorated in two colors. Also included are "silver" knives, forks, spoons, teapot, creamer and sugar bowl, as well as



two candelabras and a toy toaster. An accompanying booklet permits the young hostess to learn about table setting while she plays.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1959

**BATTERY CHEMISTRY KIT** enables elementary and junior high school teachers to teach students the generation of elec-

tricity by chemical action. Children can carry out experiments such as classifying metals according to their electrochemical traits, demonstrating electroplating and corrosion, and studying the smelting of metal from ores.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1959

**HOLIDAY DECORATION** of tough, transparent plastic is cone-shaped and 40 inches tall. Filled with burnished aluminum foil that reflects colored lights, the cone is designed for indoor or outdoor use.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1959

**TOY TRAIN** molded of washable plastic has a locomotive decorated with a saucy face and manned by a monkey wearing an engineer's cap. Three passenger cars carry a kitten, a rabbit and a puppy. The red, yellow and green colored toy is designed so that the animals move realistically from side to side as the train is pulled along.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1959

**AUTOMATIC BED WARMER** is placed on the mattress under the mattress pad. The electric warmer has many temperature settings and automatically adjusts to the temperature selected. It shuts itself off when the bedroom warms and turns itself on again when the room cools.

Science News Letter, December 12, 1959



## Nature Ramblings



By HORACE LOFTIN

WINTER is at its height. Daylight hours are few and nighttime stretches interminably long. The ground is covered in snow. The chill wind whips through the bare limbs of trees standing gauntly against a gray sky. It would seem as though the oak forest were dead and the world might be dying with it.

But high in the branches of these oaks are clumps of plants with bright green leaves. These plants are dressed with glistening white berries which promise new life to come. This touch of green is like a symbol of the downfall of winter.

This plant, mistletoe, thus symbolically served the ancient people of North Europe in their celebration of the winter solstice—that time in midwinter which marks the apparent turning of the sun northward again, with its promise of winter's ending and spring to come. When Christianity was brought to these pagan people, the old midwinter festival found itself converted into the Christmas celebration. And

Behind Our Yuletide



though the purpose of the festival became changed, many of the old rites and tokens were incorporated into the European Christmas.

Our Christmas tree, for example, is one such "relic" from our pagan past. Like the mistletoe, this evergreen stood for the rebirth of nature with the coming of spring. The Yule log, holly, even Santa Claus himself may all be traced back to pre-Christian times in North Europe.

In more southern parts of Europe the traditional bringers of gifts to children at

Christmastide were the Three Kings or other figures from the Biblical story. But in the more northern lands, Saint Nicolas (later shortened to Santa Claus) brings gifts of toys or coals, according to the past conduct of the children. This Saint Nicolas can be traced in tradition right back to one of the old northern gods who, riding on a white horse, visited pagan children.

Looking at the habits of the mistletoe, one can see a deeper symbolic relationship between this evergreen plant and the history of the Christmas festival.

The plant has its own green leaves by which it can produce food it needs to grow and reproduce. It is a thing of beauty, a cheering sight in an otherwise bleak world. Yet its roots penetrate deeply into the very substance of the oak on which it grows—the oak so much a part of the mythology of the old Northern gods. The mistletoe gathers strength from and alters the substance of the ancient oak, to grow and thrive in a world which needs its cheer and green message.

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