

CHRISTMAS UP TO DATE

Artificial Trees, with Gifts Attached, for Sale.

FOLIAGE OF GOOSE FEATHERS

Made in Germany, and Can Be Folded Up and Put Away for Future Use—Marvels of French Mechanical Toys—Lifelike Tigers and Horses—Railroad Lines and Complete Landscape of Scenery.

The days of the old-style Christmas tree are numbered. In past years the parents had to buy the Christmas tree or chop one down, haul it home, erect it in the parlor, tie on the presents, and fill the children's stockings. To-day they need only telephone one of the big department stores to secure ready to hand a Christmas tree made in Germany, the artificial foliage of which is tasteful and of a brighter green than the natural product, and which arrives loaded with presents bearing the proper labels "for Willie" and "for Mamie," revolving on a stand containing a music box attachment, which discourses lively rag-time airs. It can be folded up and stowed away in a garret until next Christmas.

Then, next year, it can be taken out again, unfolded, sent back to the dealers, and again freighted with presents. This Christmas the tired mother may send in her order to some toy emporium, and receive ready-made stockings filled with the proper gifts for each member of her brood.

The novelties in Christmas trees and Christmas tree decorations that have appeared this winter are interesting and in some cases almost startling. Several days ago a Post reporter went through the toy section of two of the largest department stores in the Capital. The artificial Christmas trees referred to in the foregoing constitute one of the most striking of this season's novelties. They are of all sizes from one to six and eight feet in height, and range in price from 25 cents to \$10 and \$12. Viewed at a distance, they cannot be distinguished from a natural Maine fir or Norway spruce, but on closer inspection one discovers that the foliage is of a brighter and more intense green than that of a living conifer, and that the limbs and branches ramify from the trunk with a regularity intended to facilitate the work of decoration, and of attaching the presents.

Come from Germany.

These trees are made in Germany by the carload. The material employed is wood, papier mache, and glazed paper for the trunk and branches, and goose feathers dyed green for the foliage. As stated in the foregoing, they can be folded up and kept over until the Christmas following, or for several. Some have the music-box attachment, and some have not, but all of them are equipped with convenient hooks, clasps, and pegs hidden about in the goose-feather leaves, from which the candy, dolls, and the toys can be attached. They are new, the first ever seen in this city having been placed on sale last week. Most of the stores are selling the decorations and fittings along with the trees, and thus far a majority of the patrons have left orders to have the trees sent to their addresses on Christmas Eve for the festivities, and with the "trimmings" attached.

The fairy-like nothings used in decorating Christmas trees have also undergone a decided change this season. Tinsel has taken the place of glass, for the reason that it affords more glitter, and is not as destructible as the latter. Stockings made of thin, pale-colored cloth, and filled with an assortment of nuts, figs, raisins, candy, toys, &c., strange oddities in the form of stars, crescents, &c., and curious colored lanterns in place of the old candles and which remove all danger of setting the tree on fire—such are a few of this season's novelties.

Perhaps the most amusing and unusual of the new "tricks," as children call them, are the icicles made of glass and imported from Germany. They are turned up at one end into a little hook, by means of which they can be suspended from little pegs in the form of knots on the artificial Christmas trees, which, in addition, have artificial pine cones fastened to the ends of the boughs. These glass icicles are strikingly realistic, especially when the tree is illuminated and decorated, causing it to resemble a cedar or pine tree cut in the woods in cold weather, and covered with frosty festoons.

Marvels in Toys.

Some of the season's new toys are marvels of the mechanical art. Although the Germans lead in the production of toys, they are inclined to be conservative and to stick to old models, and for this reason it is not surprising to learn that the masterpieces of mechanical toy manufacturing come to us this season from France. The one most deserving of mention is a toy tiger, about the size of a half-grown cat, and wonderfully true to life in the matter of eyes, ground color, stripes, tail, and general form. The outer covering appears to be of some variety of strong, felt-like cloth, painted in the colors and markings proper to the animal represented. While this toy was being examined the floorwalker of the toy department took a key from his pocket, and, inserting it in a hole in the animal's flank, which had escaped the reporter's attention, wound up the mechanism, and placed the toy on the floor.

The feline started off in a stealthy, cat-like walk, stopping now and then to raise one paw, elevating its head, as though scenting prey, looking from side to side, and then, resuming its half-crouching, swaying tread, crept away with head lowered, the whole so thoroughly realistic and true to nature that one could almost imagine the animal stalking a herd of antelope or nyl-ghai in the distance.

The first consignment of these mechanical toys to reach America arrived in Washington last week, where they are now to be seen for the first time on this continent. Up until last Monday they had not reached New York or Boston, and two of the New York papers sent their local representatives to examine and write an account of them for their Gotham readers. Another of these new French toys is a very lifelike figure of a little girl sitting in a small gig. A little boy holds the shafts in his hands, and when the mechanism is placed in operation, he starts off in a run, lifting his feet and bending his knees in the most lifelike manner, as though giving his little sister a ride. The mechanism of this toy is so complicated and involves so much detail that it takes a skilled operative eight days to make one of them. Another of the same character is a little girl sitting in a trap, to which is attached a pony. Set in motion, the animal prances off in a trot, breaks into a gallop, and then, as the stylishly dressed maiden draws in on the lines, he settles down to a fox trot, winding up in a slow walk, going in all four different paces.

Those of German Make.

One curious feature of the German toys, and one which distinguishes them from the product of England, France, or this country, is the manner in which German institutions, art, literature, and religion have left their impress upon them. The Germans are intensely patriotic, home-loving, and conservative, and the myths of the Nibelungen Lied, the Wagnerian operas, Grimm's fairy tales, the Franco-Prussian war, and German militarism have furnished the toy makers with inspiration and suggestions so that one can say of German toys what is known to be true of Japanese art—that it is part of the national development and life of the people.

Tiny Lohengrins, Siegfrieds, Brunhilds, gods and goddesses, kobolds and mountain elves, swans and Undines, monks and rob-

ber barons, lansquenets and Frederick Barbarossas there are in plenty: creatures and creations suggested by German myth and folk tale. Then upon a table nearly 90 feet in length one beholds a most bewildering array of toy railroad stuff, sold in sections and parts, so that one can purchase as much or as little as he or she may desire. The material consists not alone of mere sections of tracks, cars and engines, but a complete line of road and road scenery, tunnels, hills, deep cuts, military stations, forts and garrisons, bridges across rivers and canals, depots, docks, culverts, a complete set of railroad scenery, so that if the whole were connected it would present a bird's-eye view of an imaginary line of road running through a varied landscape.

Still, the number of people who prefer purchasing Virginia pine trees at the Center Market in the time-honored way for use as good old-fashioned Christmas trees is considerable, and it may be a long time before the latter are outclassed by the goose-feather tree. New York and New England are supplied with Christmas trees from the backwoods of Maine, where carloads of young firs, spruces, hemlocks, blue cedars, and the like are cut every season, and a large number of local people who are natives of this section prefer these trees to the Virginia yellow pine. They purchase them from the local florists, and, as a matter of fact, they are really much prettier than the Old Dominion pine. Wealthy people have of late years manifested a decided preference for the New Zealand or Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria excelsia*), grown in hot houses and botanical gardens, and introduced in this country from the southern hemisphere via England five or six years ago. They are kept by local florists and are the most beautiful of all known conifers, their peculiar fern-like foliage and graceful limbs making them desirable for ornamental purposes. They are too rare and costly to be cut off at the base and used like an ordinary home-grown pine, but are sold for \$19 and upward, growing in pots or large wooden tubs, and in this manner used as Christmas trees. Decorated and loaded with gifts, the New Zealand or Norfolk Island pine makes the most beautiful of Christmas trees, and, owing to the peculiar foliage, is not so apt to catch fire from candles as the Virginia pine or Maine spruce.