



## Oh, tannenbaum

**F**LASHING lights. Sparkling tinsel and icicles. Dozens of glistening ornaments made of glass, plastic, wood or porcelain. It's hard to imagine that the Christmas tree had a humble beginning.

Yet it is said the tradition was born when Martin Luther, while walking through the forest on Christmas Eve, was struck by the beauty of the winter sky lighted by thousands of stars.

Inspired, he cut down a tiny evergreen and set it up in his home for his children. He trimmed the tree with lighted candles to make an image of the starry heavens from which Christ had come on Christmas night.

In spite of its simplicity, a little tree is a thing of wonderment and beauty, says Better Homes and Gardens Christmas Ideas magazine. Not a twig on such a tree should be left without a shining light.

FORTUNATELY, modern technology provides today's tree decorators with safer lighting equipment than the candles of the 16th century. To avoid

fire, Christmas Ideas warns not to use candles on your tree; substitute electric lights instead.

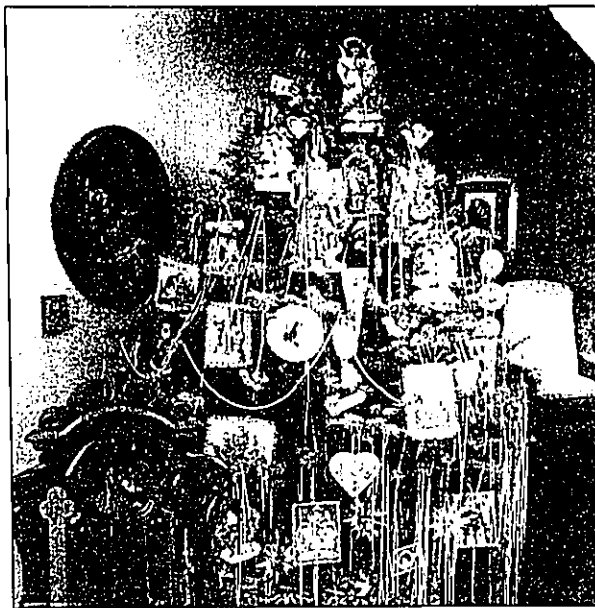
A pagan practice of decorating branches with fruit and flowers was translated into the Christian paradise tree. The tree was first shown to churchgoers as a symbol of Christ, the Tree of Life, says Christmas Ideas.

A common substitute for the evergreen tree in Germany was the pyramid, a wooden structure adorned with green branches, apples, nuts and lights.

Pyramid trees were popular among the bourgeoisie and were kept from one Christmas to another.

As America expanded its boundaries during the 19th century, the Christmas tree custom traveled westward with pioneers. Far from the well-established eastern and southern cities where sophisticated ornaments were available, tree decorating was a make-do affair.

Whatever was available was used. Nuts, pinecones, precious sticks of cin-



In England, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert popularized the tradition of decorating Christmas trees with colorful cards.

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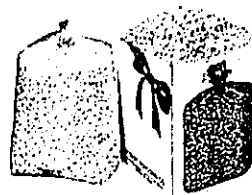
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