The Boy Who Battled for Santa.

His nose was bleedin' an' a sight
And blinking, rapid, studied blinking
Kept the tears from o'erflowing quite.
But his spirit of victory deep was drinking,
He had conquered, conquered with a sled.
In the list, 'twas "trial by combat,"
This bit champion of Santa Claus had bled,
Shed his blood for a staint they said was dead.

Timmy, who lived "down under th' hill" with his father, Patrick James, his mother, Norah Ellen, and a constantly increasing brood of brothers and sisters, was at eight almost an institution in our town. He could, so old Mr. Leahy said: "Whistle loike a mavis an' th' laugh av him is loike wather runnin' over whoite stones." The ladies of the Presbyterian Aid Society said, sometimes, and this was usually around Christmas time, "The poor little fellow." On other occasions when one of their offspring came home disheveled, tousled and tearful from Timmy's hands, they said, "The little barbarian."

Timmy took things largely as he found them and if apples, for instance, were not easy to find he hunted for them. As for clothes he was a replica of Patrick James, for didn't Mother Norah make most of the father's clothes and then remake them for Timmy? As for the toys of childhood, his were the odds and ends that the boys of Centre street had tired of or broken or those which his ingenuity had "toggled up." But don't gather the idea that Timmy was a pathetic figure. He was far from that and his glorious ability to be sufficient unto himself insulated him from sympathy.

Of sympathy Timmy would have none, and overt acts of hostility were met with the spirit that flamed in the bosom of Brian Boru. On one occasion the superintendent of the Methodist Sunday School had ejected Timmy from a Christmas entertainment when it was found that he was the heart and circumstance of a giggle storm which swept a class near where he sat. Did Timmy go home to weep? If he did it was later in the day, for his next appearance in the public eye was as one of "The Little People." He had tramped a fairy circle in the snow in front of the church, and with a mistletoe bough in his hand, was capering about in it singing an eldrich song about "Darby O'Gill an' his coo Rosie." One of the boys happened to glance out of the window and lost interest in the Christmas entertainment. It was all make-believe and tinsel and talk anyhow, he decided. So he slid out of the pew, crawled down the aisle and slipped out of the door to join Timmy. Two other boys followed and soon the crowd grew until the superintendent realized his entertainment had encountered competition which seriously threatened its success. He stopped Susie Brown "right in the middle of her song" (to quote Mrs. Brown) and went out to deal with Timmy. His own son and two other boys he dragged back into the church and promised the three who followed Timmy that their "fathers will hear about this."

From this time on Timmy and his doings on that Christmas day are known to the grown-ups only in such fragments as the three who followed let drop, and what Timmy himself told. Patched together, the parents decided there had been a fight. There was evidence on Elmer Smith's head and Timmy's face that this conjecture was correct.

"But what did you fight about?" questioned Mrs. Smith. "And right on Christmas day, too."

Elmer wriggled and swallowed hard a couple of times before replying:

"Oh, we just got talkin' 'bout Santa Claus an' then we fit an' I was gettin' th' best of it an' Timmy he squirmed up an' tumped me 'ith a sled."

Now this is what happened:

Elmer had declared there was no Santa Claus and backed his assertion by saying:

"Think I don't know them lean legs of Old Tippett"—this was the boys' name for a thoroughly detested citizen, who viewed his chestnut trees as private property—"even if they was covered up in red canton flannel britches?"

Elmer swaggered a little, jostling the littler boys, and then unbosomed himself of:

"An' there hain't no Santa Claus neither. He's jest a story made up like Little Red Ridin' Hood an' all the rest them tomfool stories for babies. An'"—this was an afterthought—"that stuff of Timmy's 'bout Darby O'Gill an' his Rosie cow, that's all tomfoolery, too."

Timmy never could bring himself to follow prescribed formulas in fighting. When he decided it was time to fight he dispensed with chips on the shoulder, lines drawn for an opponent to step across and dares and double dares. He just fought. On this occasion Elmer outweighed him about twenty pounds. He was forced to admit to himself that he had a job on his hands. He was down most of the time with Elmer on top and had it not been for a sled, which seemed wafted to his hand by the friendly "little people" when he finally did scramble to his feet it is likely that Santa Claus' champion would have been defeated. As it was, Elmer admitted he had been mistaken both about the old saint and Darby O'Gill's cow.

That evening old Mr. Leahy dropped in on Timmy's folks with a "few bits av things for the childer." To him he was never counted as a regular grown-up, for the heart of a boy still lived in his bosom. Timmy told the story of the fight and its cause, the true story. When he left he said to Timmy's mother: "Norah, let the bye go wid me part way home." Together they started, with the snow squeaking and growling under their feet and the stars glinting in the high sky.

"Timmy, 'tis a har-r-d task ye've set an auld man. But we can't have ye fightin' all over the village wid every loose-tongued lad that don't see things as you do, an' I must tell ye that fer thim that don't belave in Christmastide there's no Santa Claus, but fer thim that do belave there is wan an' always will be wan. But he don't come skyhootin' behind deers and sick loike; he lives in the hearts av thim that'll take him fer a tinint. Ramember that, lad, he lives in the hearts av them that'll give him room, an' 'tis only a bit he needs."

BY EBEN PRATT.

Christmas Flowers from Western Canada.

Roses from the Canadian prairie at Christmas time! Chrysanthemums, poinsettas and carnations leaving in their thousands to beautify and cheer points on the continent which consider themselves, climatically, far more blessed by nature! What an anomaly! In the festive season when all the world seeks floral decorations to embellish and gladden homes, churches and schools, a Western Canadian city plays no small part in providing these, and this Christmas, as on previous Christmases, the little prairie city of Medicine Hat, in Southern Alberta, has sent a profusion of blossoms all over the continent. Not only will they cover Canada, east and west, but cities of the United States will be the brighter on this holiday for the colorful touch added by these delicate blooms.

The Eden from which these flowers emanate is known as the Rosery. Fourteen years ago it was instituted with a nucleus of two greenhouses and to-day is the largest producer of flowers in the Canadian West. Chrysanthemums, carnations, violets, lilies, stocks, roses, ferns, cyclamen, flourish there, and throughout the winter months the houses of glass are glories of varied tints and perfumes. Lettuce, cucumbers and tomatoes are also grown in large quantities, but it is in the production of an abundance of rich decorative blooms that the Rosery has come to be so widely known, and created such a demand for its lovely product.

EXPANDS RAPIDLY FROM MODEST BEGINNING.

In the original two small greenhouses, a beginning was made in the prairie city with hothouse vegetables, flowers being added year by year as the business grew and the possibilities in this line were realized. The richness and excellence of the floral product brought about an ever increasing demand which was met by the addition of more and more greenhouses, until now there are thirty-two of these buildings, averaging 250 feet in length and covering about four and a half acres. A great advantage in the development of the nursery has been the fact that Medicine Hat is situated on a natural gas field, the gas for heating being supplied at cheap rates. Six large boilers of eighty horse-power each keep the plant at the right degree of temperature throughout the winter, and it is the economic fuelling with gas which permits the product of the company to compete with the product of other nurseries at very distant points.

The status which the business of the Rosery has reached has not been accomplished without years of infinite pains and sometimes serious losses. As a pioneer industry, extensive experimentation was entailed in order to discover the best lines for Western Canadian growth, and the possibility of establishing such an industry on a firm basis must have been at times in doubt. Now, however, the nursery supplies florists throughout the Prairie Provinces and many points in British Columbia.

Through Winnipeg, Eastern Canada receives its floral provisions from the nursery, where orders are also filled for the United States. The Christmas trade this year called for ten thousand chrysanthemums, four thousand poinsettas, and eight thousand carnations. Approximately sixty per cent. of these will be sent to Winnipeg for distribution in Eastern Canada, a portion of the remainder crossing the international line to aid in the Christmas celebrations of United States cities.

ALWAYS ON TIME.

Christmas, 1923.

If for this blessed Day of days
Mankind would put away
All thoughts of strife and hate and greed,
And peace and love held sway,—

If this sweet miracle could be,
The troubled world would know
The blissful joy that harmony
And love alone bestow;

And all the little birds would sing
Paeans of joyful praise,
The very trees would clap their hands,
Beasts happier go their ways!

O Love Divine, the world's heart fill
For but this one brief space,
And so benign the influence
Man never could retrace

The beaten paths of strife and hate,
But led by Love's bright star,
Pursue the pleasant paths of peace
Through all the world afar.

—Louella C. Poole.

Old Friends Are Best.

Grandpa looked at his fine new chair,
On the 26th of December,
Saying, "Santa Claus is so good to me,
He never fails to remember;
But—my old armchair is the one for me,"
(And he settled himself in it nicely)
"I hope he won't mind if I cling to it,
For it fits my back precisely!"

Father came home that very night,
He had plowed his way through the snow,
And the Christmas twinkle had left his eye,
And his step was tired and slow.
Warming for him his slippers lay,
The lovely embroidered-in-gold ones
That hung on the Christmas tree last night,
But—he slipped his feet in the old ones!

And when little Marjorie's bedtime came,
On the parlor rug they found her,
The long dark lashes adroop on her cheeks,
And her Christmas toys around her;
Neglected Angelique's waxen nose,
The fire had melted completely,
But—her old rag doll, all tattered and torn,
On her breast was resting sweetly!

It's not the rare and costly gift
That gives complete content.
The things that cheer and most uplift,
Are sometimes never sent;
The soul's desire to aid and bless—
It's this that gives us happiness.

Her Christmas shopping early
She says she's bound to do;
But early the day before, no doubt,
Is about the way it will turn out.
Is that the way with you?

When the turkey's on the table,
And the mince pie's on the way,
An' my plate is filled with fixin's
That belong to Christmas Day,
I fergit I'm over eighty,
An' about my rheumatiz,
An' it seems to me that livin',
Is the best thing that they is.

—Arthur Bigelow Paine.

A Carol.

A little Christmas Carol
Stole out on Christmas Eve,
And wandered down the highway,
A melody to weave;
To fill the air,
To breathe a prayer,
And scatter gladness everywhere.

It mounted to the belfry,
And joined the bells in play,
To sound again glad tidings
As on that Christmas Day
The Angels told
The story old
To shepherds on the hillside cold.

And then that happy Carol
Dropped to the street once more,
And sailed into a cottage,
With all its Yuletide lore;
And it eased a pain
With the glad refrain,
'Ere it wandered into the night again.

And the winds caught up the echo,
And filled the air with song,
As the merry little Carol
Danced through the Christmas throng,
To still a sigh
As it hurried by,
Or thrill a glad heart to ecstacy.

O little song of Christmas,
Come, dwell with me, I pray!
And in my heart keep singing,
As on this happy day,
That I may hear,
Through all the year,
A song of gladness and of cheer.

And travel down life's highway,
A melody to weave;
To cheer the weary toiler,
And comfort hearts that grieve;
And, as I go,
To carol so,
I may set other lives aglow.

—Nell Ruth Roffe.

Christmas Eve.

This is the children's night. Of all the nights in the year it is the only one on which children, who are notoriously interested in everything—including things they shouldn't be inquisitive about—are all concerned with the same subject.

No night is so mystic as this. It contains the essence of centuries of expectancy and belief. Does the nightingale sing until morning? Do the cattle kneel at midnight? If the children believe they do, they must. And as for that saint who fares abroad under no stars but those of Christmas Eve, this will be a blank planet when no ear listens for the rustle of his pack in the chimney.

Let no father fool himself with the thought that the world has changed. There are children in Windsor and Warsaw, in Melbourne and in Montreal who do not know about the war but who know about Christmas Eve and what happens in its still and holy hours.

So, in the name of that childhood which keeps alive the faith, let no so-called head of any house dare to dodge an inquiry to-day or flee before the whirlwind of excited youth.

New Zealand has taken the income tax off farmers, and cut down the entertainment tax by 50 per cent.

The Birth of a Babe

As I write this Christmas Editorial, Yuletide is still a few days distant. Another year has practically gone. My mind leaps to change, instability, and mutability. Then, by swift reaction, it flies to their opposites, unchangeableness, stability, certainty.

We are apt to say of most human affairs, in the words of the old hymn: "Change and decay in all around I see." Looked at from a certain angle, and especially now, it would seem, men and nations are in a state of flux. There seems to be nothing solid, nothing abiding, nothing dependable.

The panorama of "events" is constantly moving on and on, presenting startling situations, exciting crises, nine-day wonders! The jazz-band is playing meanwhile, with a bang of drums, the clash of cymbals—and anything else that is empty enough to make a big din.

SILENT STRENGTH.

Have you ever noticed that the mighty forces of Nature are all silent and slow? Nature seldom howls and hustles. Even when she does she means least. The avalanche kicks up a "dust" as it hurls itself down the Alpine steep. But it is futile. Occasionally it destroys something, but usually it does nothing. The glacier, on the contrary, although its motion is so resistless, so implacable, is imperceptible, carves mountains as a sculptor's chisel carves the block of marble.

Thunder is only a "big noise." It is "sound and fury, signifying nothing." But the silent frost splits the precipices and the hardest rock is a filbert for its fingers. The thunderous breakers dash themselves into futile foam against sand and pebbles, but the gentle rain has delved the Grand Canyon and created the mighty Amazon.

The sun shines without noise. The stars keep their appointed places from age to age, placid, unchanging. And how silently the seasons come and go. There is no fuss, no commotion. The miracle of spring is a miracle of silence and strength.

But the silent forces are not all in Nature. They are in the spirit of man. Not conquerors and demagogues, not "wars, and rumors of wars" have built up the mighty fabric of human society. Of course not. The little things have always in the end bossed the big things. Nobody noticed the silent falling of the acorn; but behold the oak! It grew silently.

And it is the "continuance in well-doing" of simple, normal, unnoticed people, their religion, their education, their quiet, unobtrusive influence, which changes society from age to age, and makes good better, and better best. These have been the primal forces making for stability.

WHAT CHRISTMAS MEANS.

And what has this to do with Christmas? Everything. Governments may change, but it makes no change to Christmas. It is the Festival of the Things that Matter. At Christmas we get down to rock bottom. And what does it consist of? Human love and kindness, charity, family life, home and kindred, little children, joy and good fellowship, and noble and true-hearted citizenship.

Christmas stands for these things. It is an annual reminder of the big, unalterable, silent forces of life; it is the salt which preserves Society, saving it from pollution and decay.

Christmas stands for the moral idea. When we get down to that, I say, we are at rock bottom; something stable on which to build the foundations of our policies and politics, our diplomacies and our treaties—in fact, our whole social and economic life.

That is why Christmas is so valuable. It brings us right up against unyielding realities, the things that don't shift, and slip and give way. It exhibits in their true light the shibboleths, the subterfuges, the catchwords, the expedients upon which we set such fictitious and disastrous value.

At Christmas we commemorate what countless millions of men and women regard as the greatest event in history. And what was it? The birth of a Babe. Think of it! What a trivial incident! Moreover, the Babe only lived to the age of thirty-three, and then died the death of a malefactor! How silent He was! Yet how strong!

TRUTHS WHICH ENDURE.

He disintegrated the mightiest empires, shattered immemorial usages, customs, and systems, and remodelled whole continents of thought and experience. Yes, Christmas reminds us of these things, and it is well that we should be so reminded. Perhaps the terrible experience of the war has made us trivial. We need to get back to bed-rock, we need to build the bridge which is to carry the world safely across the morass into which it seemed fated to plunge, upon the great verities which never change, the truths which endure. And it is these things for which Christmas stands, however we may camouflage it with junketings and joviality.

I am far from deprecating these things. I love Christmas for its fun and frolic, for its "fireside enjoyments," its "intimate delights." But, at rock bottom, its meaning is tremendous, for, as Kipling says, when:

"The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart,
Still stands Thy ancient sacrifice,
The humble and the contrite heart."

and, when all is said, if there is not a seriousness under our joy there is no solidity, and if there is no solidity there is no stability.

A Unique Development.

The Provincial Boys' Work Parliament which will assemble in the Legislative Assembly Chambers, Parliament Buildings, Toronto, on December 27th, 28th and 29th, is a unique development in the work with boys. At the same time Boys' Parliaments will be held in Alberta and Manitoba. Canada is the only country in the world where boys meet in such organizations for the government and promotion of work with boys.

Out of the hundred and six constituencies in the Province of Ontario, advice has been received to date of seventy-five boys elected to the Parliament and it is expected that probably ninety will be actually in attendance. The elections were conducted following the usual Parliamentary practice and in many points were keenly contested.

While in the City of Toronto, the boys' time will be fully occupied in the work of the Parliament or in entertainment. The boys will be banqueted by the Rotary Club and also by the Ontario Boys' Work Board, at which they will be welcomed to the city by the Mayor. Other interesting events will be pulled off of particular interest to these Tuxis boys. Premier H. T. Ferguson will be present at the opening of the Parliament and will extend a formal welcome on behalf of the province.

Great interest is being manifested at many points in the province and a number of boy leaders are planning on coming to Toronto to attend the Sessions of Parliament for observation and a closer study of the Canadian Standard Efficiency Program in its provision for the fourfold development of Canadian citizenship.

Don't let Christmas on your farm be the only day that seems like it.

An Ancient Carol.

The following interesting carol is preserved in Poor Robin's Almanac for 1695. It is of interest as throwing light on the material side of the old-time Christmas celebrations.

"Minced" pies are referred to, it will be noticed—a term never heard nowadays. And instead of our plum-pudding there is "plum porridge"—a not so attractive dish, one would think! The carol reveals, too, that the material for Christmas decorations was fuller in the old days, including holly, ivy, bay, rosemary, and "lawrel."

"Now, thrice-welcome Christmas,
which brings us good cheer,
Minced pies and plum porridge, good ale and strong beer;
With pig, goose, and capon, the best that may be,
So well doth the weather and our stomachs agree.
Observe how the chimney do smoak all about,
The cooks are providing for dinner, no doubt.
But those on whose tables no victuals appear,
O may they keep Lent all the rest of the year!
With holly and ivy, so green and so gay,
We deck up our houses as fresh as the day.
With bays and rosemary, and lawrel compleat,
And everyone now is a king in conceit.
But as for curmudgeons, who will not be free,
I wish they may die on the three-legged tree."

It is of interest to learn that the well-known and oft-used couplet, "Christmas comes but once a year, And when it comes it brings good cheer," originally appeared in a mock Christmas play of the fifteenth century. Here are the lines:

"Bounce buckram, velvets dear,
Christmas comes but once a year,
And when it comes it brings good cheer."

The chief charm of Christmas is its simplicity. It is a festival that appeals to every one because every one can understand it. A genuine fellowship pervades our common life—a fellowship whose source is our common share in the gift of the world's greatest Life which was given to the whole world.—Arthur Reed Kimball.

O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie!

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark street shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

O holy Child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!

Phillips Brooks.