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# The Boy Who Battled for Santa.

BY EBEN PRATT.

His nose was bleedin' an' a sight And blinkin', rapid, studied blinkin' Kept the tears from overflowin' quite. But his spirit of victory deep was drinkin' 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 whoitie 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 oldrich 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 a y'now, 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 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 'th 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 fool stories fo' 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 wadded 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 believe in Christmastid, there's no Santa Claus, but fer thim that do believe 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 tintin'. Remember that, lad, he lives in the hearts av them that'll give him room, an' 'tis only a bit he needs."

## 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 smok 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."

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## Christmas Eve.

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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.

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.

With all good wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

## Christmas, 1923.

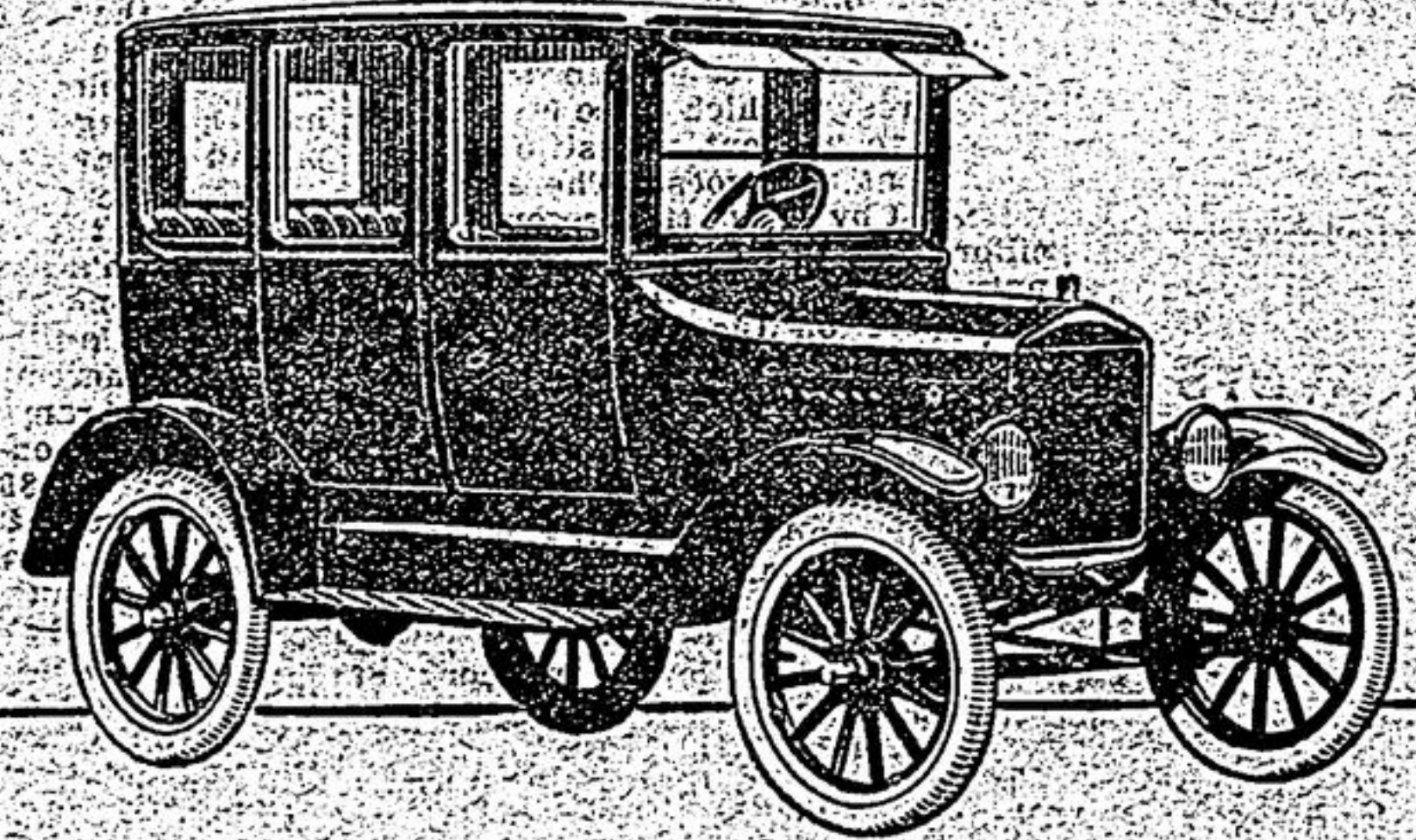
If for this blessed Day of days Mankind would put away All thoughts of strife and hate and greed, And peace and love held sway—

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.

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



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