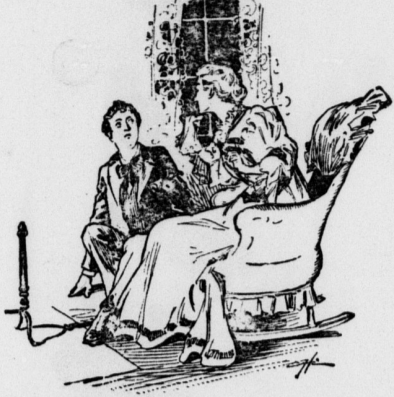


OIL ON THE WATERS.  
A TALE OF TWO CHRISTMASSES.

"Well, this has been what I call a Christmas," said Ben Habberton, with a great sigh of content as he threw himself into an easy chair in the great guest chamber that was his for the time and stretched his feet out toward the cheery log fire.

"Now, I imagine," he went on, talking to himself in a light hearted way, "that a few days of this kind of life



"OH, MY SON! HOW COULD YOU DO IT?" would tempt even me to give up knocking about the world and settle down, as they all want me to. By George, I have a notion to do it. Mother says that granddad wants somebody to look after the estate, and if he could only trust me he would be glad to have me do it.

"Confound it all, that's what sticks in my crop. Nobody ever trusted me so far as I know, and I never would explain anything, no matter how suspicious the circumstances might be. So I always got blamed for everything. Hanged if I don't think that even mother used to think I took all the cream that any of the cats stole.

"Foolish, of course, to run away and go to sea, but what could a fellow do when he is always getting into scrapes and is too proud to deny anything even when he isn't guilty? Well, I've seen half a dozen years of life and had a good fling out of it, but I don't remember that I ever did anything to be ashamed of. Hello! Who's there? Come in, the door isn't locked. Why, mother, is it you? Crying? What on earth is the matter?"

Springing to his feet, he took the poor little lady in his arms and placed her carefully in the big chair. Then pulling a stool forward he sat on it at her feet, and laying his head in her lap said: "There, mother. Do you remember, this is the way I used to sit when I was a little fellow? Now tell me all about it. What has happened?"

But she only sobbed the harder for a time, and at length when she could command her voice she cried out passionately, "Oh, my son, my son, how could you do it?"

The curly head was lifted instantly, and the handsome, boyish face grew sulen and hard. Recklessness and pride were Habberton family traits, and Ben, though a younger son, was a true Habberton.

So he said nothing, knowing that he would hear more presently, and he did, for soon his mother talked on weakly and, if she had only known it, foolishly: "You know your grandfather always respected you of being wild, and after you went to sea he always said you'd come to some land end, and I had hard work to get him to ask you here for Christmas, but after you came he liked you ever so much. He would not have asked you to sit with him this afternoon if he hadn't, and even when he dropped asleep and you left the room he wasn't angry. He said of course you wanted to be with the young folks. But how could you take that money? You ought to have asked me if you needed any. I know you said you had come back as poor as you went away, but I did not think you needed it right away. I can return it to your grandfather, of course, but he is so angry that he says he will have you arrested in the morning, and I do believe, Ben, that he would have made you his heir. How could you do it, Ben?"

Ben had grown very white, and his fists were clenched tightly when his mother paused, but he said quietly: "So you and granddad have discovered that I am a thief, have you? How did you find it out?"

"Why, he had \$500 in bills in his writing desk. It seems he saw it there just before you went to his room, and there was no one else there up to the time he missed it."

"So he says I stole it, does he?"

"Don't use such words, Ben. Of course you didn't mean it for stealing, but I am afraid he will have you arrested—and think of the disgrace! Why didn't you ask me for money, Ben?"

It was something like an imprecation that the young sailor muttered under his breath as he rose to his feet and walked up and down the room for a few moments. But no word more of any kind could he extract from him until she had exhausted herself with weeping and pleading. Then he led her to

Let room, and, kissing her tenderly, bade her good night.

Going back to his own room, he resumed his reverie. "Well," he thought, "I had a merry Christmas, for it's after 12 o'clock. And now for the old life. Cowardly, folks would call it, I suppose, to run away with a charge like that over my head, but I don't think it is. If I stay, the old man will surely make a row in the morning and there will be a great scandal. If I go, he will be too proud to make the scandal for nothing. He will call \$500 a cheap price to get rid of good for nothing me, and that will be the end of it. Poor mother thinks I'm guilty, too, but they won't tell anybody else for shame's sake, and if they can't trust me let them think what they will.

"Five hundred dollars," he muttered, with a nasty sort of laugh, under his breath. "That's rather a small sum to turn a thief for, but I wish I had a hundredth part of it just to get grub till I strike another job. I could get it from mother easily enough, but I'd rather go hungry than take it from her, thinking what she does.

"But it's best for me to go. I would not care so much about it if it weren't for Alice. Perhaps that's best too. I don't know whether she would care. Probably I never will know now, so here goes."

And opening his window carefully and noiselessly he swung himself out on a huge vine that clung to the side of the house, and, lowering himself hand over hand, he was soon on the ground. It was only five miles to town, and he was there long before daybreak.

Now Alice was a certain wide-eyed, clear-witted, young second cousin of this headstrong youth. They had never met till three days before, but great things are done in three days when Cupid lurks around old-fashioned country houses where the mistletoe is used among the decorations, and Ben was very much mistaken in thinking she wouldn't care. She would and she did.

Being quick-witted, Alice was also impulsive, and sometimes it was well that she was so. On the morning after Christmas she passed old Mr. Habberton's door very early on her way down stairs and was greatly surprised to hear angry words inside. As the door was open she entered.

"I tell you he stole the money, and I shall send for the police," stormed the old man, and Ben's mother, who had been pleading for mercy, gave up the struggle. "I would have sent last night if it hadn't been Christmas."

"Why, who has been stealing, Uncle Ralph?" asked Alice.

Even in his anger the old man paused. It seemed a cruel thing to accuse one of his own kin, but the case was too clear. "The young rascal, Ben!" he exclaimed and told the story of the money.

"Then Alice had occasion, if never before, to be thankful for her quickness. "I don't think Ben looks like a thief," she said, "but, uncle, you say you saw the money in your desk just before he came in."

"I certainly did," said Mr. Habberton. "But are you sure you left it there?" asked the girl.

The old man looked at her in surprise. Then one emotion chased another across his rugged features until presently he sank back in his chair with an expression of great disgust at himself.

"I'm surely getting old," he exclaimed. "I put it in the safe and forgot that I had done so. Don't let anybody tell Ben that I suspected him."

"But I told him last night," said his mother.

"Then go quickly and tell him to come here till I apologize. You have all of you been too ready to accuse that boy all his life."

This seemed rather hard to Alice, who had certainly never accused Ben of anything, but that wise young woman held her tongue while Mrs. Habberton hurried out of the room.



AN IMPOSING RITUAL.  
Christmas Celebration Among the French Canadians  
Where the Day Is More of a Holy Day Than a Holiday and Where Gifts to the Little Folk Are Not Credited to Santa Claus.

Jean Episte Leblanc of lower Canada has this advantage over his cousins in the rest of the Dominion, that his Christmas celebrations are not confined to one day, but are divided between that great holiday and New Year's. Then again he has the further advantage of an early start, for while the English folk are still sleeping snugly in their warm beds he is out attending mass at church or cathedral. Indeed it may be said with truth that Christmas among the French Canadians is more of a holy day than a holiday, as it constitutes one of the four great church festivals of the year.

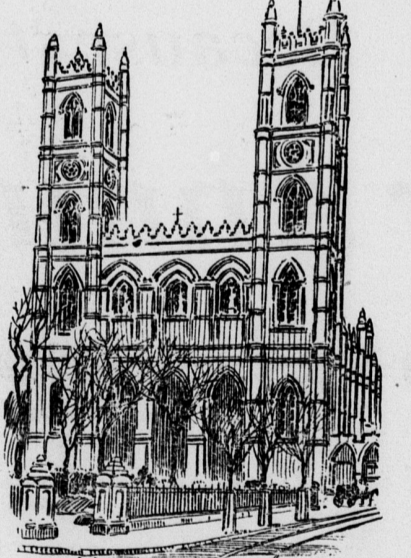
The celebration of the day begins at midnight on Christmas eve, when, summoned by the chimes of the bells, all good Catholics who can manage it crowd to the sacred edifices, which are appropriately adorned for the occasion, and there take part in an elaborate service lasting nearly two hours. The splendor of this service, of course, varies according to the equipment and facilities of the establishment, being comparatively simple in the remote country churches, while in the large edifices it becomes a superb religious function.

The midnight mass in Notre Dame church or St. James' cathedral, Montreal, celebrated as it is before congregations of many thousand people, is perhaps the most imposing and awe-inspiring religious ritual to be witnessed upon this continent. The musical features of these services always receive careful attention, with the result that the whole proceeding is made so interesting as to attract large numbers of Protestants who are willing to forego the comforts of sleep in order that they

may be spectators of the proceedings. To what extent this is the case may be judged from the fact that for the midnight mass in the Jesuits' church of Montreal, where the music is always of an exceptionally high order. Those not having the right to a seat in the church may obtain one by payment of a fee, and these seats may be reserved in advance, just as they may be for the theater or the opera.

Not in this the only important religious function of the day. In many places there is also an evening service, where again the proceedings are very elaborate and create the music very beautiful. Since the advent of electricity and its wonderful adaptation to purposes of ornament there has been added to this vesper service in Notre Dame church a novel and striking feature in the sudden illumination of the great altar. Just when darkness has shrouded the vast edifice by means of innumerable electric bulbs cunningly concealed in the intricate and florid carvings of the whole altar front is instantaneously illuminated, producing an effect which cannot be adequately described in words.

In the rural districts the midnight



NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL, MONTREAL.

service, if not so sumptuous in its appointments, is indubitably more picturesque, for there, as the hour approaches, one sees the great stone church that dominates the parish lit like a vast lantern, and stretching from it on either hand the homes of the habitants, each one doing its little best in loyal imitation. Hardly have the big bells in the tower begun to ring out their clear call upon the crisp, cold air than the little bells on the horses' necks send back tinkling responses as one after another the carioles appear upon the road and speed swiftly toward the church.

The houses are awake and ablaze all night, for when the long service at last comes to an end the congregation does not go quietly home, but breaks up into little groups, that with chattering and laughter hasten indoors to enjoy the bountiful supper which is the reward of their piety and at which by immemorial custom doughnuts and potted head form the pieces de resistance. These family gatherings are perhaps the cheeriest of all the year. The strangeness of the hour, the sense of satisfaction at having done their duty as good Catholics, the inspiration, no doubt, gathered from the service they have just attended and the fact that the day already broken in to is to be given up to pleasuring to the full extent of their ability, all these influences not only combine to put everybody into the best of humor, but to produce an exaltation of spirits that drives all care and worry into temporary oblivion.

For those who are very piously disposed this midnight mass by no means completes the religious programme of the day, for if they so choose they may again attend high mass at 10 o'clock, vespers at 2 o'clock and benediction at 7 o'clock, thus practically spending the day in the church.

Not many, however, are so devout as all this, and the majority of the men go in for a good time, according to their taste, whether it be to gather at the tavern and play cards and checkers, or to regale one another with well worn stories garnished with tobacco and eau de vie, or to engage in horse racing, shooting matches and similar sports.

As I have already stated, Jean Baptiste divides his Christmas. By this I mean that two important features of the festival are celebrated by English people on the 25th day of December and by the French for the 1st day of January—namely, the giving of presents and indulgence in especially good fare.

With regard to the giving of presents, in which the French take just as much delight as the English, it is interesting to note that these presents, as they are called, are by the little folk credited not to Santa Claus, but to le petit Jesus and are perhaps all the more enjoyed on that account.

As to the ordinary characteristics of the day, my readers may perhaps be interested in a list of dishes, some or all of which may be found upon every French Canadian dinner table on this occasion. They are: Pain dore (toast with eggs, rare aux potatoes (potato pie), poulet sauce lanche (chicken with white sauce), tartiflette (meat pie), grasso de roti (fresh pork grease), cochen a lit (sticking pig), paleron (roast of fresh pork—shoulder) and tarte aux suelles (pie made of baws).

J. MACDONALD OXLEY.

The Boar's Head.

Aside from its religious observance and significance Christmas has always been a time of feasting and jollification. This temperance has descended to us from the days of the old Germanic and Scandinavian nations, when the time was set aside for rejoicing and pleasure prior to the Christian era, but even as late as the seventeenth century in England and throughout continental Europe the delights of the table were paramount. With our forefathers a soused boar's head was lorne to the principal table in the hall with great state and solemnity as the first dish on Christmas Day. In the book of "Christmas Carols," printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1521, are the words sung at this auspicious moment:

The boar's head in hande bring I  
With rousander gay and rosmery.  
I pray you all synge merrily—  
Qui estis in convivio.  
The boar's head I understande  
Is the chefe servyce in this lande,  
Loke who ever it be fande.  
Serve it cum caruco.  
Chaucer alludes to this custom in the following passage of the "Franklin's Tale":  
Jenes sitteth by the fire with double berd,  
And he drinketh of his hagle borne the wine.  
Before him standeth the braunce of the tusked swine.

The Same Old Christmas.

A description two centuries ago of the festivities of Christmas shows little variation from present customs: "Families take it by turns to entertain their friends. They meet early, the beef and pudding are noble, the mince pies peculiar, the nuts half playthings and half eatables, the oranges as cold and acid as they ought to be, furnishing us with a superfluity which we can afford to laugh at, the cakes indistinguishable, the wassail bowls generous, old English, huge, demanding lades, threatening overflow as they come in, solid with roasted apples when set down. Toward bedtime you hear of elder wine and not seldom of punch. Girls, though they be ladies, are kissed under the mistletoe."

Christmas Greens.

In olden times holly was used only to deck the inside of houses at Christmas, while ivy was used not only as a vintner's sign, but also among the evergreens at funerals. For formerly "the rooms were embowered with holly, ivy, cypress, bays, laurel and mistletoe." There are thousands of quaint old verses that could be quoted in praise of the rosemary, laurel and mistletoe. A love of nature, her fruits and flowers, her roses and vines with their mystic significance seems to have been a predominant trait among those who gathered at the Yuletide.

A CHRISTMAS SERMON.

Lessons Taught by the Birth of Christ. The Duty of Charity and the Nobility of Self Sacrifice.  
—How Art Has Paid Its Tribute to the Nativity.

It was the distinctive glory of Christ's evangel not that it introduced a new code of morals or of social ethics, but rather that it emphasized the force and broadened the scope of those existing and gave them higher sanctions and infinitely greater importance from being exemplified in the perfect life of Christ himself. There were people who had been just, true and God fearing before Moses brought down the tables of the law from Mount Sinai, and men acted the role of the good Samaritan, animated by the purest benevolence, thousands of years before Christ taught by precept and example the duty of charity and the nobility of self sacrifice. Even the sermon on the mount only presented in concrete form rules of conduct which regulated the lives of many in all ages, not with the force of law, of which there might be none, but as a result of self originated conviction and feeling.

Love in Christ's code of ethics was both the soul and body, the animating principle, as well as the performing agent. It was no longer be true, kind and pure because it is a duty so to be, but all that because you love to be so. No mere formal acquiescence or compliance will meet the requirements of this new presentation of the moral law. It demands absolute obedience, but as the outcome of love, not as the result of authority or the claims of duty.

Has the Christian church (assigning to this term its widest and most comprehensive meaning) ever come within measurable distance of realizing the exalted Christ ideal? Yes, possibly, in the apostolic age and for a short time subsequent, but it would be absurd to claim that the Christian churches of today, great as is their influence for good, are animated by the spirit of the early Christians or inspired by that divine enthusiasm which made each one of them a center of light and largely transformed society throughout the known world within a century after the birth of Christ.

We are now like Moses on Mount Nebo—we see the promised land, but it is still in the dim distance, and we are apparently getting no nearer to its haven of rest—but how soon would the prospect change were the gospel of love and humanity, preached and lived by Christ, to become a distinctive feature of our civilization instead of the materialistic and selfish motives which largely sway modern life and determine conduct!

The Saviour was born under the humblest possible circumstances, as if to show how low in the estimation of God are all the pomp and magnificence of that wealth and power which men prize so highly. His Virgin mother was poor, his foster father was a mechanic, and he himself dignified labor by earning his bread by the sweat of his brow. Christ was emphatically the Saviour of the poor, and those who bear his name best show the sincerity of their professions by imitating him in his loving kindness and benevolence. Charity is a duty incumbent upon Christians at all times, but even the most humane will feel prompted to be kinder and more sympathetic while celebrating the advent of one who displayed during his whole lifetime upon earth a divine compassion and pity for the poor and the suffering.

Not the least of the lessons taught us by the birth of Christ is not to despise the humblest or be hopeless of the most depraved of that species so honored by Deity that he came and took its form and assumed its nature with all its imperfections. However low in the scale of being persons may be, there is a spark of the divine in them still, a trace of that promethean fire breathed into man by the source of all life and all consciousness which constituted him a living soul.

The story of the advent and of its climax—that amazing act of self sacrifice—has been the solace of the weary and heavy laden in all the intervening centuries. The song of the angel choristers chanted over the lowly place of his birth, conveying heaven's message of deliverance for man, has sounded throughout the centuries, like an undertone of hope, above the discords of life and the mutterings of despair.

Philip James Bailey in "Festus" writes: We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths; In feelings, not in figures on a dial. We should count time by heart throbs. He most lives Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best. The stupendous mystery of the advent and the perfect life that followed it made it possible for mankind to attain the high state of perfection so beautifully illustrated by the poet. Precepts were not wanting before, but henceforth there was a perfect life as a model for all ages.

Doubtless all events, however impossible it may be to perceive their trend, contribute to that far off divine event Toward which the whole creation moves. The poets have sung of that day, philosophers have written of it from the earliest times and optimists think they see its near approach, but it must be confessed that the signs of its coming are not promising. Education and culture, art and science, while they may prepare the way for it, are at best only subsidiary. That day will never dawn until human society is permeated by that spirit of love and unselfishness which characterized the life of Christ.

NEIL MACDONALD.