Yours' Faithfully,—Santa Claus

By Louise Richardson Rorke

It was Christmas week. Outside there were snow and sleigh-bells, and occasionally song and laughter, as some merry party swept by under the street lights just outside the window. Once or twice there was the metallic ring of steel, which Kenneth, listening in the huge chair just inside the window, interpreted as skates, though he could not catch a glimpse of them. Hockey sticks he knew and greeted with a little wistful grin. He, too, could play hockey "when he was ten." But four years was a long, long time to wait—think how long it was to wait four hours! Judged by this standard, four years was forever. Kenneth turned his attention to "inside."

Here there was warmth and light and comfort—a sort of lonely, stiff comfort that was worse, some way, than being cold, or in the dark, or even than sitting very still on a bare, hard seat as at church. It would be one hour more till his father came. Then they would sit together in the big arm chair and talk until Kenneth went to sleep. They had always done this since he could remember. It was splendid, this talking time—and breakfast together was good, even though Ken sat quiet as a mouse and Dad read the paper. But the days that intervened were long weary stretches of minutes and hours, divided now between stupid lessons with Miss Crewe, whom Kenneth disliked because she called him "dear," and walks in the park, also with Miss Crewe, and lonely games on the lawn, or aimless excursions to the kitchen where he might talk to Cook, or Nellie, or to Jim, the chauffeur. To be sure, neither Dad nor Mrs. Mellis, who was housekeeper, really approved of these kitchen visits; but there was no one else to talk to, for Mrs. Mellis, to quote her own words, "had no liking for young children," and, since she took little trouble to conceal the fact, Kenneth found no comfort in her dutifully kind ministrations and in her condescendingly cheerful remarks.

His one playmate was Jackey Creith, and it was all so different at Jacky's that a lump rose in Ken's throat at the very thought.

"What we need," he speculated moodily, "is a mother."

Two years ago, when he first knew Jackey, he had not made this diagnosis, having, poor little chap, small knowledge of the gracious ways of mothers, but had come home from his first visits at the Creiths to beg his father to "get Mrs. Creith" for them. "I need her for my breakfuses an' to go to bed to," he wailed. "She hears prayers better'n Mrs. Mellis. Jacky laughed out once sayin' his so God heard him; an' God jus' laughed, too. God couldn't never laugh while Mrs. Mellis was hearin' prayers." Mrs. Creith, he was informed, was busy taking care of Jackey and of Mr. Creith; it wouldn't be fair to coax her away from them (even if she would come), when they had found her first. Being a just little soul and generous withal, Kenneth accepted this state of affairs with resignation. Later he learned that while no house was quite so nice as Jacky's, all houses with mothers were good, and very, very different from one where there was not a Mrs. Mellis and a governess who says "dear" without an

And then, once, just once, he learned another thing—that mothers don't really have to be mothers to be mothers!

It happened in this way—a mean way to start on such a nice discovery—Kenneth was sick—not just croup, or a pain, but really sick enough to have Dad stay home all day, and Doctor Huston come, and afterward She came.

"Where's your little boy, Miss Fair?" he asked one day, after the very worst time was over and he wanted to talk again.

"My little boy, Ken?—Why, I haven't any little boy of my own—just have to borrow you."

"Girl, then," said Ken, laconically, "I know all right you're a mother. You're just like Jacky Creith's mother only altogether different. But the difference is just in your looks and your ways; you really are like her—that's how I know you're a mother."

Miss Fair laughed. "I'm not, though, Ken," she said. "I haven't any little boy or girl of my own to take care of. That's why I could come to you."

"And you're not a mother!"

"No."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

Ken turned away disconsolate. He wasted a few tears on the pillow, where nobody saw them, before Miss Fair began to teach him the new sick-game. It was a jolly game where you laughed a great deal, and it was all over and Kenneth nearly asleep before the great idea came to him.

At its suggestion he was wide awake.

"Miss Fair," he began, warily, "I want to say my prayers. May I say them to you?—I mean to you to God?"

"Why, yes, Kenneth—just there where you are. I know God will hear that way."

But a little worried pucker crept between Kenneth's brown eyes.

"I can't do it that way," he protested. "It wouldn't do; I wouldn't know a thing! I must kneel on my knees right down beside you. I can't do it any other way. That's the way to pray, Miss Fair—my Daddy says so. He says even when I'm tired and sleepy I must wake up an' be a sport an' say my prayers to God. An' he told Mrs. Mellis I mustn't grow up like a heathen. So you see I must say 'em right, Miss Fair, mustn't I?"

There was no denying such a weight of argument. A warm woolly blanket was wrapped around Kenneth and he was lifted to his feet in the bed. Miss Fair was sitting on its edge. She made a clear, smooth place beside her, smooth and bare as a floor.

"Now, Ken," she said, "kneel there and put your head against my shoulder—so—like that. Now, go ahead, old chap."

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
And this I ask for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Ken mumbled the little prayer in a rapid monotone, half articulate. He was listening with all his childish heart to know if God would hear. It was his test. He did not stir when he had finished, but still knelt with his face against his nurse's shoulder. There was a queer hushed stillness in the room. Miss Fair's arm was around him; he felt her lips against his hair—all cosy and warm and

After a moment he looked up at her with starry eyes.

"Yes, that's the way it is," he said. "You don't really have to be. God heard 'em."

Miss Fair answered back his smile. She never teased a chap with stupid questions.

"Why, surely, Ken," she said. "Now let's go to sleep."

* * *

"Dad," said Kenneth, "there's something I think we could do—you an' me—if it wasn't too dreadful expensive," he hastened to add, remembering Cook's admonitions.

"Well, son—what?"

Kenneth and his father were having dinner together. Ken had had dinner downstairs now for more than two weeks, he and Dad and Miss Fair. Most days now he was up all day, but nobody had said lessons and he and Miss Fair had glorious times together in the park. Sometimes, too, his father came home early and they three had long drives out into the country, where the last reds and golds of autumn were slowly changing into misty grey. When Ken grew tired there was always a place to rest inside his father's arm—but when he was really very, very tired he loved best to snuggle up beside Miss Fair.

"You're a dandy mother, Miss Fair," he whispered once, and did not see the lovely color flooding her neck and cheeks and creeping up to the very roots of her hair. But in the seat in front Regan had caught the whisper. The car sprang forward with a sudden little burst of singing speed.

After that day there were weeks when they three were often together. Mr. Regan would come swinging in from the office—Ken grew to listen for the cheery slam of the front door—half an hour at least before his usual time. He always walked up lately, leaving the car and chauffeur at the disposal of Ken and Miss Fair. Dinner was a lovely time full of laughter and fun; and after dinner now the piano was opened and Miss Fair sometimes played for them while his father smoked and Ken lay curled up in a little heap on the rug and watched the fire. On those nights half past eight and bedtime came all too soon.

But for the last week things had been different. Ken tried unsuccessfully to puzzle out the reason. It was not—at least not altogether—because his father was so busy now down at the office that he was seldom at home for dinner, and Kenneth and Miss Fair dined, they two together, in the big dining-room that always seemed to Ken so vast and lonely when his father was not there. It was not—at least not altogether—that Miss Fair was going away in a few days—some other little boy needed her now. It was perhaps these two together and something else that Kenneth could feel but could not understand. There was in all his world a vague feeling of trouble that oppressed him.

"Well, son—what?"

"Couldn't we just keep Miss Fair for us, Dad? She'd be a dandy good mother for us. We need one awful bad."

"Dad, can't we?" The note of anxiety in his voice was a protest against the sudden silence which had fallen between them at his question. "Dad!"

Regan looked across the table into the wistfully eager eyes of the boy.

"I'm afraid not, my son," he said; and some way Ken divined that the hurt was not all his own.

"Dad, why? Can't we raise her salary?" Ken's experience was of servants rather than of mothers.

"She wouldn't stay with us for that, Ken. Somebody else wants her, somebody who can give her a great deal more than we can and make her a great deal happier."

"But they wouldn't love her any better!"

"No, but she—she'd be a great deal happier there, Ken. I think she's right."

"Why would she be, Dad?"

Regan stirred restlessly, yet because he valued the boy's loyalty and confidence he felt that this explanation must not be flinched.

"Well," he said, whimsically, at last. "You and I, Ken, would be quite a peck of trouble for anybody to take care of. We've got too many gray hairs between us." Somenow the humor failed.

"Did you ask her to stay, Dad?"

"No, Ken; I found out in time."

"In time?"

"Yes—not to trouble her. We don't want to make her worry about us just when she's going to be happy, do we, son?"

"No-o," said Ken doubtfully.

"No, of course we don't. So we'll pretend to her, won't we, that we can get on very nicely. We can, you know, you and I. And that will be our secret, yours and mine. Since she can't stay with us we'll never let her know we wanted her. That's a pretty big secret for a little chap, Ken; and I think it is the first real secret you and I have had together; do you think you can help me keep it?"

"Sure I can," said Kenneth eagerly. For the moment this sharing of a real secret looked larger to the boy than any loneliness to come. "We'll never let her know," he said with enthusiasm.

But a moment later a little of the old longing came creeping back. "Why won't you put me to bed, Dad?" he pleaded; and later, this petition being granted, "Aw, stay with me, Dad—just till I go to sleep."

Regan stayed. He lay and faced the years with the boy's fingers twined about his own, and smiled grimly to remember that he had thought himself too old to care. Finally he slept so, and only wakened and stole away with the first gray of the dawn.

The secret had been kept. With absolute heroism Kenneth had said good-bye. It was Miss Fair who went away with tear-wet lashes while the boy, his old joy in the secret revived for the time being, assured her how "nice and happy" he and Dad could be. As for Regan his good-bye was so formally courteous, his thanks so gravely expressed, that Miss Fair, remembering the good comradeship once established between them, went away half hurt and altogether puzzled at the change. Now it was two months after and the week before Christmas.

Out of the very needs of the case Kenneth, waiting alone in the big library had evolved a plan. He went across to the desk and sitting down in the big chair drew towards him the heavy pad of letter paper which lay there. It was business stationery and the name of the firm of which his father was the president was engraved in the corner. He pondered for a moment and then chose the red ink as a more Christmas-like means of communication.

"Dear Santa Claus," he wrote. "Jackey Creith wroted you a letter las' Christmas an' asked you for a byeseacull an' you graved him it. Please Santa Claus will you send to my Dad an' me a mother. We need her so. We thought once we had found one for ourselves, but some one else wanted her an' she didn't want to belong to us cause we were too much a trouble an' grayheaded so we jus' never let her know how bad we wanted her an' she went away. Please, Santa Claus, send us another one. We'll take good care of her. Cook says I lost my mother while I was little an' that my Dad lost his Wife then too. She says they were the same. An' that was careless of us, but if you'll only send us another we'll take good care an' not lose her. The mother we thought we had was so pretty an' suited us best of all we've ever seen, even Mrs. Creith. Won't you please send us one somethin' like her, please Santa Claus do this.

Yours lovingly,
Kenneth.

P.S.—My other name is Kenneth Regan.

P.S. agen.—If you'll jus' only give us this one thing we want so bad I will do without any Xmas presence for ever an' ever amen an' I know so will my Dad.

your lovin' Kenneth."

He folded it up, ruefully over its red blots, and put it into an envelope to match the paper. Sealing it carefully he addressed it to

Mister Santa Claus,
North Poal,
Toronto, Ont.

He hunted for a stamp and, having chosen a queer brown-colored one because it looked well with the brilliant scarlet address, he slipped out of the house and sped away to the post-box at the corner where he might mail his precious missive.

"Dad," he said that night. "I've arranged a Christmas presence for you, a great surprise."

"Good for you, son," said Regan, looking up from his favorite paper.

Two days later he detected a smile in the eyes of his stenographer as she handed him the letters which had been sent up from general office for her perusal. Deep down in the pile lay one unopened and enclosed in the ordinary business envelope of the firm. It was addressed in a round sprawling childish hand to "Santa Claus, North Poal, Toronto." Some waggish official had marked "not found" and the letter had been returned to the firm whose address figured in the corner.

"Ken, I'll be bound," he laughed as he broke the seal. "Well, old son, you've been a rare good kid; whatever you want from old Santa I'll see he gives you if the old saint has to go out of business to do it."

He read the letter with a laugh that smothered a sigh.

For a long time he sat musing at his desk, the missive, blotted and scarlet-lined, between his fingers. Then drawing his own pen from his pocket he wrote beneath the sprawling signature.

"Dear Passing Saint,

"I pray you hear and grant the prayer of this my little son. Not only for our surpassing need but for the love we bear her, send us her Christmas presence in our home that she may reign there as she now does in our loyal hearts.

"Grant us but this, dear Saint; so shall we praise and adore, world without end.

"John Kenneth Regan."

The ordinary business signature looked strangely out of place under the odd boyish petition. Regan smiled. He folded the letter and shoved it carefully into Kenneth's blotted en-

velope, thus enclosing this in another addressed this letter to Miss Marion Fair.

"Oh, by the way, Ken," Regan spoke across the Christmas breakfast-table to a face of utter disappointment. "Santa Claus asked me to tell you that he has given you the present you asked from him in your letter, but that you must wait a few months because she could not come at once. But you may go with me to see her this morning."

The boy's eyes were like stars.

"What is her name, Dad?" he whispered.

"Marion Fair."

"O, Dad!" cried Kenneth. "O, Dad! isn't Santa Claus a gentleman!"

The Festive Tree.

From time immemorial a tree has been a part of the Christmas celebration. It may be seen outside the traditional mangers in the missals and early paintings of the pre-Raphaelite Italian school. In the trees or near it are seen angels in flowing robes singing out of a scroll of illuminated paper the "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men," or "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!"

Far back in the days when Egypt was one of the mighty nations of the world the people of the land used the palm tree for almost the same kind of festival at almost the same time of year as our Christmas. The palm puts forth a fresh shoot or sprig each month, and at the fetes or parties during the last week of the year each guest brought a palm "spray" with twelve shoots as a symbol of the closing of another twelvemonth.

In those old days the Egyptians were wide travelers, and thus it happened that the custom was carried into Italy, but here the fir trees was substituted for the palm, and its tips were decorated with tiny candles burning in honor of the great god of seed-sowing, Saturn. There arose the custom of exchanging on certain days, known as the Sigillaria, figures of wax or candy, and these were sometimes tied on the trees in gardens or forest.

At length the idea of the tree passed into France and Germany and Denmark, where for centuries the primitive tribes hung either living animals or wooden images of them on the pine trees as sacrifices to the gods, and naturally these people very readily accepted the idea of the Christmas tree with its gifts and candles.

River Jordan is Unique.

In one matter Palestine enjoys an advantage obvious at once to the student of her maps. The river Jordan which Joshua crossed dryshot, in which Naaman the Syrian bathed away his leprosy, and where John the Baptist preached, is unique.

Among the rivers of the world there is no other like it. The source of the Jordan is 900 feet above sea level. From that source to its outflow, the distance is only sixty miles, but it is a distance which the river itself, by frequent winding, more than trebles.

The outflow is not into any open sea but into a lake surrounded entirely by mountains and exhausted only by evaporation or soaking of the water into its bleak and desolate shores. This lake is so charged with various salts that to sink in its waters is impossible, while bathing severely tests the complexion.

Most remarkable of all is the fact that the lake, supposed to contain the ruins of Sodom, Gomorrha, and other cities of the plain, is situated 1,300 feet or thereabouts below the level of the sea.

Nowhere, not in the Grand Canyon itself, is there a phenomenon so mysterious and so sensational.

Christmas!

C for the candles that make the tree light;
For carols the choirs sing on Christmas Eve night.
H for the holly that hangs in our houses,
R for the reindeers who, while the world drowses,
Trip over the rooftops a wonderful team.
I Well, I guess, sirs, that I is ice cream, while
S is for stockings filled up to the brim;
For snow and St. Nicholas—can't forget him!
T 's for the turkey and T's for the tree.
M's for much merriness for you and me.
A is for all of us.
S for the star that shines in the heavens
Where good angels are!

Roast Apple on the Stick.

Place the apples in a baking dish or pan. Do not remove the cores or stems. Bake until nearly done, then remove from the fire and cover them with a coating of syrup that has been cooked to 300 degrees Fahrenheit. Set in a buttered dish to harden. Mount on sticks or meat skewers. These apples are delicious Old World delicacies.

"We Three Kings of Orient"

Melchior, Caspar, Balthasar,
Led to the Babe by a shining star.
Journeying, each, from a land afar.

Wondrous gifts to the Child they bring,
Such as are meet for a noble king,
And down at His feet their wealth they fling.

Speeding along on their homeward way,
In the gray dawn of the crescent day,
And pausing their last farewells to say.

"Yea, I am glad that gold I bore,
But His crown sparkled even more.
Did ye not see it?" said Melchior.

Spoke Caspar, "His smile was sweet to see,
And worshipping low on bended knee,
I rejoiced I brought incense with me."

"I saw in His side a cruel scar,
And nail prints His baby hands did mar.
Why gave I the myrrh?" sobbed Balthasar,

The Ontario School Trustees' and Ratepayers' Association No New Fad

By W. M. Morris

W. M. Morris
Ontario School Trustees' and Ratepayers' Association.

There may be an impression in the minds of some people that this Association had its origin but a few years ago, whereas, it has a history of thirty-five years. This Association was the outcome of the wise and timely action of the Whitby Board of Education, under date of March, 1887. In response to circulars sent out by that Board, representatives of some two-score Schoo' Boards assembled in Toronto, in June, 1887, and organized a School Trustees' Association, the objects of which were as follows:

1. To provide a medium of communicating to the Minister of Education, the views of the people of the Province on educational questions and pressing the same on his attention.

2. To consider all matters having a practical bearing on Education and the School System.

Annual conventions have been held regularly since 1887, at which such vital subects as the following were discussed:

1. Pupils' Fees in High Schools and Collegiate Institutes.

2. Improved methods of Financial Support in Public and High Schools.

3. Assessment for Public and Separate School Purposes.

4. Holidays in Rural Public Schools.

5. The Method of Payment of Public School Grants.

6. The Relation between the Practical and Cultural Subjects of the Curriculum.

7. The method of electing Public School Trustees.

8. The Establishment of County Model Schools.

9 Physical Education in High Schools.

10. The Teaching of Agriculture in Public Schools.

These are a few examples, taken at random, from the programmes of the Annual Conventions held from 1887 to 1893 These and similar subjects were debated, resolutions were adopted and committees appointed to call the attention of the Minister of Education to the conclusion at which the Association had arrived. The results of the deliberations at these conferences can be distinctly traced in School Laws. Ministers of Education repeatedly assured the trustees in Convention of the indebtedness of his department to their suggestions.

In 1892 the Trustees' Association affiliated with the Ontario Educational Association and have met annually ever since, at Easter, in connection with that body. The O. E. A., as it is commonly called, has a history of sixty-one years. It is a very hopeful sign for education in Ontario, to see teachers, inspectors and trustees meeting together and co-operating in educational progress. This is as it should be in all the counties, townships and communities of Ontario. The tragedy of educational controversy between trustees and teachers is the suffering and loss endured by the child.

The attendance has been far from gratifying; the average for many years prior to 1921 being about one hundred. Considering there are 5,548 rural schol boards, with three trustees each, making a total of 16,644 rural trustees beside the trustees of towns and cities making a total of approximately 20,000 school trustees in Ontario, the average attendance of one hundred very inadequately represented the educational forces of the province. Take the Convention of Easter, 1919, as an example. There were seventy-five registered delegates that year, twenty-six from cities, twenty-five from towns and villages and twenty-four from rural schools, and as some of the rural delegates were sent by county councils and some came of their own accord, it is a question whether any school sections of the province took the matter into consideration at the annual meeting held the last Wednesday of December, and appointed a delegate. Why should we complain about school regulations in face of such a neglected opportunity to participate in determining the educational policy of the province?

In the meantime School Trustees' Associations of a very progressive character came into being in the Western provinces. The Manitoba and Saskatchewan Associations were having an attendance of from one thousand to three thousand at their Annual Conventions and have been great factors in building up the educational systems of those provinces. The Departments of Education in these provinces rely on the judgment and co-operation of these Associations as a Deputy Minister remarked recently, We always confer with the executive of the Trustes' Association on important matters of school administration and the Government considers the annual grant to that body money well spent."

What was wrong with Ontario? Either the rank and file of school trustees of Ontario had become apathetic to the educational needs of the child or they did not know of such an organization. Those in attendance at the Convention of 1820 assumed that the small attendance was due to lack of publicity on the part of the Association, which was accordingly reorganized and steps taken to organize the counties and townships of the province. A grant was received from the Government, which enabled them to send programmes to every school board and campaign for a larger attendance. The result has been a very great increase in attendance and a stimulation of interest in education throughout the province. County and Township Conventions are now being held all the time at which people are encouraged and given an opportunity to discuss school matters and to make suggestions for the improvement of our educational facilities. It is a democratic campaign, to give a square deal to the rural child.

The most debatable question in educational circles to-day is the centralization of administration. There are those who advocate Township or County School Boards and even Provincial centralization in the interests of efficiency. We must have more efficient schools, greater permanency and maturity in the teaching profession and secondary education for rural children. The advocates of centralization maintain that the old three-trustee school section system is out of date and does not function to meet present day conditions. There are others who contend that the present system, which provides for a great degree of local autonomy, is more democratic, that it is better to have forty-five trustees in a township than five members of a Township School Board. We all admit that the success of the present system depends on the interest people take in education. School trustees should know something of the science of school attendance, the best methods of administration and the physical, mental, moral and spiritual needs of the child. This brings us back to the beginning of this article and the aims and purposes of this Association. It is to stimulate a greater interest in the school and assist trustees and ratepayers to study our educational system and administer our schools.

THE GUIDING STAR

We all must have some philosophy of life, some ideal which we keep before us as a guiding star. It is this ideal, this cause, to which we devote our energy which gives unity and purpose to our whole life. This ideal must be high enough and broad enough to be worthy of our full devotion. Any ideal which is simply individualistic, looking only to self-interest, will not answer, for it will be a false star leading us to the hell of selfishness.

The Social Ideal is what we should ever keep before us as our guiding star. We are called upon to develop, not destroy, our individuality in order that we may become more efficient ministering members of Society. This Society we may well call the Brotherhood of Man if we like, but remembering that God is the Spiritual Father of us all we shall do better if we call this Society the Democracy of God, the rule of which is this: Each for all and all for each.

As individuals we are members of various communities in ever-widening circles, beginning with the family to which we belong and ending with the Community of Mankind.

The spirit of social service which manifests itself in ministering service to the community is the supreme motive which leads us to devote ourselves to the Social Ideal. In other words, we must seek to incarnate in our daily lives the spirit of unselfish love.

This is the message of Christmas. Social Idealism as a philosophy of life is both sound and good, but it is, as it were, a cold, bare skeleton. It is Christian religion which takes this skeleton and through emotion and imagination clothes it with warm, living flesh—the Incarnation of the Ideal.

The Star of Bethlehem has led multitudes to a life of loving service. The story of Christmas has done more than anything else in the world to lift mankind out of the hell of selfishness.

"Unto you is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord." Love Incarnate, Love Divine. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many."

The Spirit of Christ in us is the Hope of the World. As many as are influenced by the Spirit of Christ are the loyal members of the Democracy of God.—Bishop F. H. Du Vernet.

The Feast of Lights.

The lights on the tree are said to be of Jewish origin. In the month of Kisley, of the Jewish year, corresponding nearly to our December, and on the twenty-fifth day, Jews celebrated the feast of dedication of their temple. It had been desecrated on that day by Antiochus. It was dedicated by Judas Maccabeus, and then, according to the Jewish legend, sufficient oil was found in the temple to last for the seven-branched candlestick for eight days and it would have taken eight days to prepare new oil.

Accordingly, the Jews were wont on the twenty-fifth of Kisley in every house to light a candle, on the next day two and so on till on the eighth and last feast of the feast candles twinkled in every house.

It is not very easy to fix the exact date of the Nativity, but it fell most probably on the last day of Kisley, when every Jewish home in the house and Jerusalem was twinkling with lights. The Greeks also call Christmas the feast of lights, a name given to the dedication festival, Chanukah, by the Jews.

Huge Canoe from a Log.

Puget Sound Indians recently launched a 75-foot canoe hollowed from a cedar log.