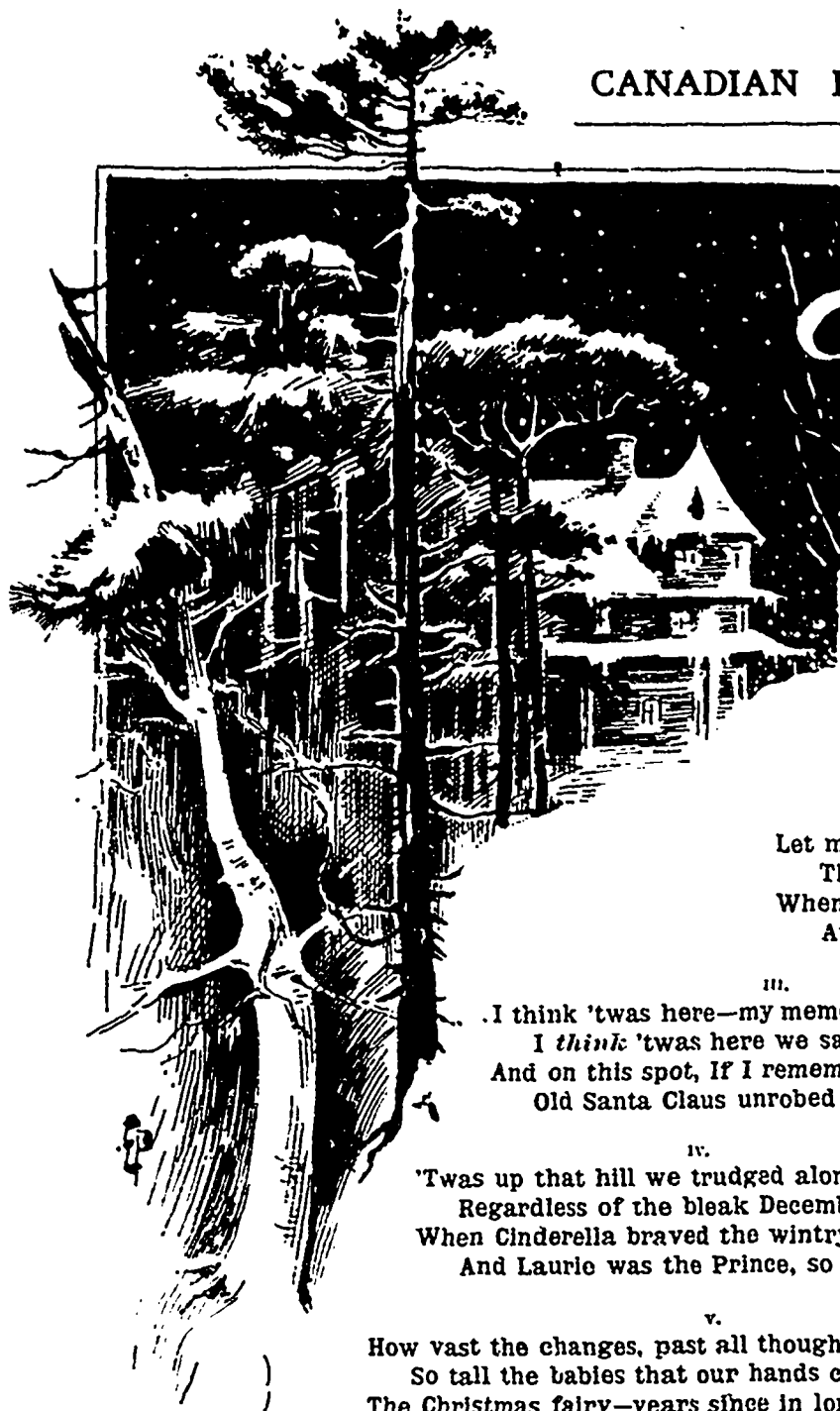




Winter Tales

BY LILIAN CLAXTON.

DEAR Old-time Home, the shadows close around you.
The pine trees wave above you, grim and sere,
Let me recall you as when first I found you,
In days belonging to a distant year.

Let me sweep back the time that followed after
Those hours that I am dreaming of to-night,
When you were all astir with talk and laughter,
And all your windows were aglow with light.

I think 'twas here—my memory fails me slightly—
I think 'twas here we sat and joked at tea,
And on this spot, if I remember rightly,
Old Santa Claus unrobed the Christmas tree.

'Twas up that hill we trudged along together,
Regardless of the bleak December snow,
When Cinderella braved the wintry weather,
And Laurie was the Prince, so long ago.

How vast the changes, past all thoughts or guesses!
So tall the babies that our hands caressed!
The Christmas fairy—years since in long dresses,
And Laurie farming far away out West.

Yes, ye have changed, ye merry lads and lasses,
Ye have trod further along life's rough track,
Ah me, how vain to stem Time as it passes,
Ah, how impossible to call it back!

And yet our idle thoughts will turn and hover,
About the airy, golden days of yore,
When we awake to find the play is over,
The footlights are blown out along the floor.

Dear Old-time Home, the night wind moans around you,
The forests close about you grim and grand,
The silent mists of eventide surround you,
A silent shadow in a shadow land!

JUST YOU AND I.

IT is such an old word, and such a simple one that we have to say to-day—as old and simple as the Christmas story itself, and as needful to be uttered. So it shall be spoken without flourish of phrase or color.

And it is this: Christmas shall be to you and me what we make it; not what others make it for us: but rather what we make it for others and ourselves.

A truism, you answer me. Yes; but again I say one that needs to be spoken. For there is much talk to-day, in the slipping away of the times and seasons, of the gradual disuse of the festivals which mark them.

And this is not well, friends. We need our Easter and Thanksgiving, our Christmas and New Year, and all the bright feast days that lift their flower heads above the duller level of the year's field of days. For modern thought and the higher criticism are ruthless scythes that mow the turf to closest cropping; and although they make of it a most velvety level, yet our hearts hunger for the daisies and buttercups and the wild waving grasses again.

We need our Christmas; we cannot afford to let it go.

There is little danger of forgetting it in homes where children are. Santa Claus and the Christmas tree, the carols, and the dear old Christmas story—all these weave their enchanted atmosphere over the child-life dwells. But in the childless homes, or those out of which the little ones have

passed; in the homes where the atmosphere is no longer enchanted, but clear and dry with breathing of adult years—there it is that Christmas must be made much of, or from them will come the too familiar cry, "We have lost our Christmas, it passes with us as a common day," or that still sadder one, "It is the dullest day in the year."

There are men and women who may not care that such is the case; who are content to give, grumbling, the few gifts to consider that conventionality demands, to eat a too rich dinner, drowse away the remaining hours, and go to bed uttering thankful exclamation that the Christmas has passed for at least another year. Our words are not for these.

But there are others who are not thus content, and who truly mourn the dullness of the season, or its unmarked passing; men and women without children, without much means, or it may be without homes. To such I give the word "make your Christmas."

"How shall we make it?" comes the query.

The answer is brief but it comprehends all, "Put the Christmas spirit within you."

Again the question is asked, "How shall we do this?"

And I answer, with suggestions most simple; for our speech is not to the wealthy, not to the rich living and covetous thinking, who, indeed, neither desire nor understand the Christmas spirit; but to those out of whose lives Christmas has somehow slipped away, and the observance each year has taken a greyer hue.

First there are the Christmas greens. The

very odor of the fir and cedar suggests Christmas, bringing visions of the little country church, with its fragrant green festoons and crimson berries, its mottoes, its carols, and all the happy childhood associations. No home should be without the Christmas evergreen, whether it be the mansion or the single room.

Then there are the carols—the dear old hymns, and the Messiah, if you are musical enough to reach up that far. Sunday schools, choirs, choruses, are busy practicing the bright, Christmas music; is it suggesting much that you should find opportunity to join them, as singer or listener, during December days, so when the Christmas service comes you shall be truly attuned?

There are the Christmas papers also. One or two lying upon your table, with their bright illustrations and amusing stories, are not they accessory to the season's pleasure and stimulative of the season's thought?

Again, we may let our minds dwell much on the Christmas story; until, when the bright busyness of the days are over, and we lift our eyes to the starry sky, there shall come before us the vision of that sheep-watching in the Eastern fields.

This is making the right Christmas atmosphere; one that we shall live in, not for one day only, but during all the December days.

He who cramps his Christmas into twenty-four hours, knows nothing of its expansive power. It should begin with the first bit of cedar picked up from the weighted street dray—it should continue on in sweet influence till Easter enfolds it in the mantle of her glorious shining. FAITH FENTON.