

Thanksgiving Prize

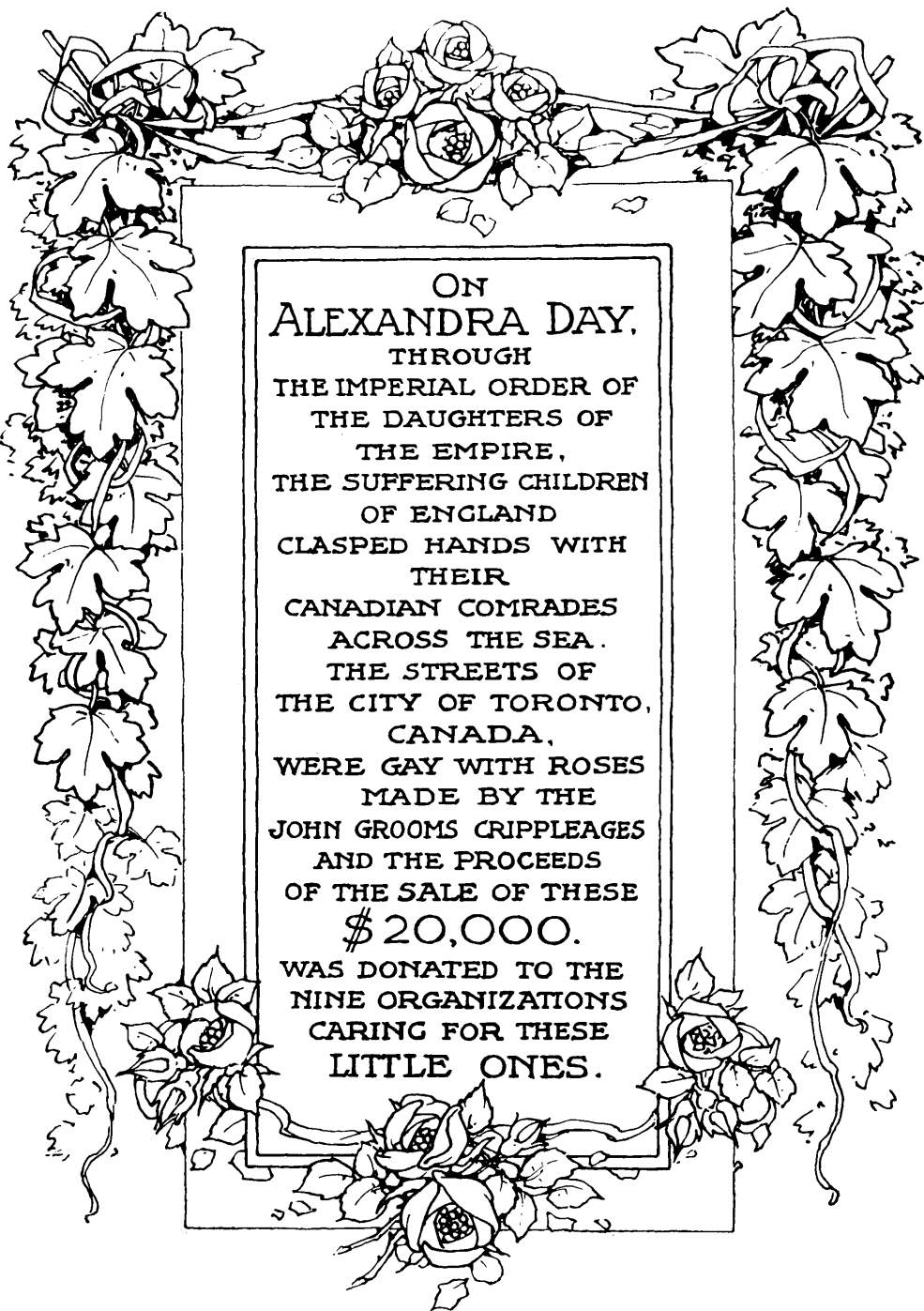
Echyle Stewart

Oct 8th.

Class 9

St. Giles S.S.

A Soldier of the
King



ON
ALEXANDRA DAY,
THROUGH
THE IMPERIAL ORDER OF
THE DAUGHTERS OF
THE EMPIRE,
THE SUFFERING CHILDREN
OF ENGLAND
CLASPED HANDS WITH
THEIR
CANADIAN COMRADES
ACROSS THE SEA.
THE STREETS OF
THE CITY OF TORONTO,
CANADA,
WERE GAY WITH ROSES
MADE BY THE
JOHN GROOMS CRIPPLEAGES
AND THE PROCEEDS
OF THE SALE OF THESE
\$20,000.
WAS DONATED TO THE
NINE ORGANIZATIONS
CARING FOR THESE
LITTLE ONES.

A Soldier of the King

*A True Story of a Young
Canadian Hero*

BY

HELEN STIRLING

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
25-27 RICHMOND STREET WEST
TORONTO

To
The Great-Hearted Friend of Canadian Children

JOHN ROSS ROBERTSON

*who has done so much to comfort and restore
to health and joy the weak and suffering ones
in*

*The Toronto Sick Children's Hospital
and*

*The Lake Side Home,
this story of a young Canadian Hero
is inscribed*

“Come, Charlie, Mother is ready,” said Mrs. Russell to her little lad, who, arrayed in his best, stood gazing silently up the long street of the old limestone city.

“Oh, Mother; wait, please; wait, the soldiers are coming. Come, come, Mother, they’re coming,” and he flattened his little nose against the pane in

his eagerness to catch the first glimpse of his heroes. As the dull rumble of a muffled drum filled the summer air, Mrs. Russell went to the window and, standing behind Charlie, laid her hand softly on his shoulder.

Dearer and nearer came the mournful, fitful sound, the tramping of the horses and the rattle of the arms. Charlie stood still as a statue as the solemn procession passed by. Many times he had watched just such an one, but each time his little heart beat faster and the love for his heroes, the soldiers, grew stronger.

Now with beating heart he

watched the military band, with black streamers and muffled drum, and listened as he had never listened to the low throbbing tones of the "Dead March."

He saw the silent cavalry men, like moving statues, the escort, the gun carriage, attended by the pall bearers, bearing the long, narrow casket tenderly shrouded by the grand old flag for which the soldier it now covered had fought and fallen. His charger, saddled but riderless, with drooping head, led by a comrade of the dead soldier; the infantry with arms reversed;

the mourners; these all filled Charlie's little soul with noblest pride, but a new, strange sorrow.

“It's grand to be a soldier, but it's lonely sometimes,” he said at length. “Let us go now, Mother,” and looking up at her he slipped his hand into hers, as if he wished to hold her close to him.

In a few minutes Charlie and his mother were seated in the old, historic, dimly lighted church.

Charlie dearly loved those Saturday afternoon recitals, and gladly forsook the choicest game to go and sit dreaming as he listened to the organ throwing out into the silence its wonderful harmonies.

This afternoon his heart and thoughts were with the soldier lad borne by his comrades to his resting-place on the hillside, under the pines, and he could still hear in the distance, fainter and fainter, the roll of the drum.

With his head on his mother's shoulder, Charlie sat listening and looking at the beautiful western window, another of his joys.

The sinking sun flushed into a new glory and life the exquisitely clad figures of the window, and as the deep notes of the organ stole into the silence, it seemed as if all the

figures moved and that the Master Himself were stepping toward Charlie, with hands outstretched, saying in soft, full tones, "Come! come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," while those gathered about Him joined in the refrain, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

So sweet, so appealing were the face of the Saviour and his wonderful invitation, Charlie was about to rise and go to Him and with Him, when clear as a bell there rang through the

church a sweet, childish voice,
singing,

“Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take me to your care;
Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take, oh, take me to your care.”

Charlie was awake now, and as he opened his eyes, saw close to the choir-rail, in white surplice, a little boy, not much bigger than himself, his little head thrown back, his face glorified by the golden light from the window, as he threw the notes, clear as a bell, out into the silence. There was a pause; then again

the sweet voice rose and
fell in the well-known boy's
soldiér song, ending in the glad
refrain,

“When I'm big, I'll be a soldier,
That is what I'll be.”

Charlie jumped from his
seat and stood watching the
little white figure earnestly,
then, as the song ceased, turned
around and with a satisfied
smile and quick nod, clambered
into his place, beside his mother.

No more dreaming for Charlie now. He had found his future. Day after day he marched himself to school with, "When I'm big, I'll be a soldier, that is what I'll be."

Day after day, as he buckled his soldier's belt, and set his fiery red helmet on his head, his voice rang out,

“When I ’m big, I ’ll be a soldier,
That is what I ’ll be.

But too soon the little soldier’s song and march ceased. The nagging pain which he had felt for a long time in his back, and which so often he had forgotten as he marched bravely, singing his little marching song, came oftener and stayed longer.

Then the doctors told him that he must help them to make him well by keeping very still.

So, day after day, he lay on

his couch, the little, white,
thin hands, erstwhile so busy,
now painfully idle, his great,
brown eyes growing bigger and
deeper.

Listening to stories, he sometimes forgot his weariness and pain, and the hours when his father lifted him from his couch and held him tenderly in his arms while he told him of the deeds of great, good men and women, were his happiest.

He seemed never to tire of

hearing of the brave doings of his soldier boys, and Piper Findlater, who, sorely wounded, piped his Highlanders up Dargai Heights and inspired them to make the charge which meant so much to England, in the struggle in India, became one of his best beloved heroes.

His father seemed to know, so well, too, just when he needed to hear this story and told it to him over and over again.

When the day was done,

there came the sweet, quiet hour when he had his mother all to himself.

Then she read to him of the country which is not so very far away, where the inhabitants “never grow sick,” and of the wonderful King of that fair land, and in some strange way through these stories and talks he grew braver and able to bear the weariness and pain.

Sometimes his mother, who slept by him on a couch, in the stillness of the night could hear

**the sweet voice singing very
softly,**

**“Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take me to your care;
Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take, oh, take me to your care.”**

One day his "Own Doctor" whom he loved much, came in, and sitting beside him, told him very quietly, as he held his little hands in a strong, loving grasp, that there was now only one way by which he might hope to win health and strength.

The way was a weary way

of great pain, but he could walk it, he knew he could; he would be brave, he was brave, a real soldier, and some day he might be well again.

A few days after, when his doctor came bringing with him another doctor, and the treatment was about to begin, his own doctor took his hand and said: "I have not heard you sing your marching song, in a long time, Charlie. What was it? That grand song of yours? Something about being a soldier. You should hear this little chap sing, doctor. What was it,

Charlie? That grand song of yours?"

"When I'm big, I'll be a soldier,"

. . . .

said Charlie, brokenly, as his lips quivered and he choked back the tears.

"You could not sing it for us to-day, could you, Charlie? But some day you will, as you come marching back from the war, with the Victoria Cross on your breast. Just now this is your battlefield," he whispered, as he stood over the little sufferer, "and there are very

few braver soldiers on any field.”

Poor Charlie! he needed all the words of cheer and hope, for day after day the pain grew more constant. He felt it was becoming more than he could bear. He had been brave and silent through it all, but he feared he could be so no longer.

One day the operation was more than usually severe, and his doctor's heart was torn in sympathy for his little patient; the intense stillness of the room was suddenly broken by a faint whistle.

Tremulous at first, but soon growing louder and faster as the pain became more intense, rose the shrill notes of "The

Cock o' the North." Faster, faster, with an occasional break, that sounded like a sob, came the melody, then gradually sank until, in a soft strain, it changed to the sweeter, martial air,

“When I'm big, I'll be a soldier,
That is what I'll be.”

As the doctors laid down their instruments, the whistling ceased and Charlie lay exhausted, but with a bright smile he whispered to his own doctor, “I got them up right to the top.” But his doctor was suffering too with the anguish known

only to the noble, tender-hearted surgeon, and with a firm hand-clasp he hurried out into the bright autumn air, the plaintive whistling echoing in his ears.

“Whom did you get to the top?” he asked Charlie that evening, as he sat by his couch enjoying with him the little talk for which he so often stole time, “the top of what?”

“My soldiers,” said Charlie, with a bright, proud smile. “When you were hurting so, and I almost cried, I made

believe that I was Findlater, the piper, with his two legs shot off, piping his soldiers up the hill. I guess his legs hurt more than you hurt me, and the more you hurt, the faster I made my soldiers go. They went up pretty fast, didn't they. I got them right up to the top, and then when you didn't hurt so much I just marched round among them and whistled my little soldier song. Will I be quite well soon, doctor? It's a long time since you began to try to make me better, and I do want to be a soldier."

“You are one, now, Charlie, my boy. Your enemy is pain, and how bravely you are fighting, I know. I am as proud of this little soldier as I am of our big Canadians who are fighting so nobly for our Empire, and so is your General. He fought with pain, too, Charlie, and gained the victory, and so will you. See how the sun lights up those clouds. The clouds help to make the sunset glory. A little while ago we could not see the sun because of them, but the sun was shining all the time behind. The clouds will pass away, the

sun remains. So will the pain pass away, and you will still shine on.”

“The clouds have come to the sun’s funeral,” said Charlie, as he lay with his face bathed in the glory of the west.

“It’s like my soldier’s funeral,” he continued; “the clouds are the flag and the little birds are the band. But the sun does not die, and neither did my soldier. Perhaps he’s still a soldier. He just went out of our sight, as the sun does every

day, but we know it is shining all the time, only other people see it.”

But as the glory faded and the darkness crept over the towers and trees, his enemy, never far away, made another attack; and moving his little hands uneasily, as his large

eyes grew wistful, he murmured, "I'll have to send them up again," and the little whistle echoed through the room.

Days and months passed and Charlie still lay on his couch, with periods of intense pain.

In his quieter moments, with his face to the west he sang his little song, and was with his Gordons in the far east, or for him the room broadened out

into a South African veldt, and he led his khaki-clad men across the open, rushed them up the kopje, hid them behind boulders, till the great movement came, when he led them on to victory. But his strength was failing and his spirits fell.

Lying still one day, he overheard a visitor tell his mother of the needs of the city hospital, and the enlargement to be made, and that ladies of the city, and societies, were furnishing the rooms.

For some days he was very quiet, even in his pain forgetting to whistle.

“Mother,” he said, one day,
“may I not sit up just a little
while? I think I could.”

“We will ask your doctor,
dear, and here he is to answer
you himself,” and she moved
to let the welcome one close to
the couch.

“And what does Findlater
want now?” said the doctor.

“I think I could sit up a
little, just a little, doctor, don’t
you?”

“Tired lying still?”

“No, yes, I am, but it’s not that,” and seeing they were quite alone he unfolded the thoughts with which he had been busy through the long, still hours.

“You may try it, Piper, but do not work too hard,” said his friend as he said good-bye, and the smile he got in return was like the sunset glory.

Days of excitement and interest followed, in which the little soldier beat back, again and again, his assailant. Many were the journeys made in his

little wheel-chair to the different stores, and many and varied his purchases, all of which ended in grand fashion one bright spring day, when the little patient, propped up with innumerable pillows, surveyed his stock in trade, arrayed so temptingly by willing, loving hands. What a stream of customers, and what a tinkle of silver, as article after article over which he had spent long hours was borne away by some happy purchaser! What a day for Charlie! When the last of all his friends was gone he was helped back to his

**couch and lay tired and worn,
his little hands clasping tightly
the bag which held his precious
treasure.**

Some weeks later a beautiful spring day broke over the old city, and many hearts were glad, and many eyes turned to the grey pile below the university, the remodelled city hospital.

As the afternoon wore on, throngs passed up the street

and entered. All doors were thrown open, and each and every department was inspected by every one; kitchen, dining-room, laboratories, nurses' rooms, public wards and private rooms.

Opening from the hall on the second floor were the private rooms. On a table in each room lay a card bearing the name of those who had furnished and equipped the room. One, daintily furnished in white, was the gift of a happy group of school girls, "The Willing Helpers," while

another, in blue and white,
was the result of the loving
labours of a group of “The
King’s Daughters.”

But one, in blue and gold,
was the centre of interest.
In this room there was, by the
window, a couch, and on the
wall two pictures. One, where
the little patient's eyes could
fall upon it quickly and easily,
was Charlie's favourite of the
Master, as He stood with hands
outstretched to the multitude,

saying with infinite tenderness, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." The other, close beside it, was of Sir Galahad, beneath it written in Charlie's own hand, "When I'm big, I'll be a soldier." On the table lay a card, "For some little boy or girl who suffers, with Charlie Russell's love."

The eyes of all who gathered in this room were dim with tears and their voices hushed as they spoke of the wonderful work of the little soldier who had whistled and worked his way through the dark, cold

winter of pain and weariness, but who, that day, even as they lingered there, was fighting his last fight with these enemies.

“Mother, dear,” he said, just as the sun was sinking, and his voice was very faint, “what shall I do? I can’t—whistle any—more—and—the pain—is coming again.”

“Can you sing, just a wee, wee song?” said the wise mother with a breaking heart, and kneeling by him she began softly, “When I’m big—I’ll be a soldier.”

“No, no, Mother;—I can’t—sing that—any more, for I’ll never—be big—and I’ll never—be—a—soldier.”

“Then there never was one,” said a voice he loved as his brave father bent over him. “You’ll win all right, Piper—you must, you know, you can’t help it—you’re British.”

Charlie smiled up to him, but turning to his Mother said, “Sing about my angels, Mother dear;—I’m so tired;—perhaps He’ll come—and give me rest, a little while;—and,” turning

his face to the sunset glory,
“then maybe—I’ll be a soldier
—too—on—the—other—side.”

. . . .

He lay quietly watching the
glory of the clouds, then
suddenly lifting his head from
the pillow, called,

“Mother, come close;—Daddy
—Doctor — see — see;—He has
come for me;—angels — ever —
bright—and——”

• • • •

The tired head drooped, the
weary voice ceased, and
another brave soldier passed
out of the trenches to his new
and wonderful billet.

