Whether Common or Not

By [illegible]

Writin' Rhymes

I ain't claimin' no poet style,
But jus' keep writin', an' maybe I'll
Grind out somethin' after while
That'll bring t' quiverin' lips a smile—
An' I'm content if that helps some
To keep a-goin' when troubles come.
Sometimes what I write don't rhyme,
An' poetic feet don't keep good time;
An' as f'r grammar, well, maybe I'm
Kindo weak, an' th' errors climb,
But I don't keer; I do my best
An' keep on writin' with added zest.

Don't take no flights o' fancy high,
F'r soarin' ain't my mission. I
Jus' sit down t' my desk an' try
T' make smiles chase away th' sigh.
Write common stuff f'r common folks
Whose tired necks wear weary yokes.
Can't write no high toned poetry;
Jus' write o' th' common things I see—
O' chil'run climbin' upon my knee,
An' humble cots where th' home ties be—
Jus' haltin' rhymes o' th' common things,
An grind 'em out f'r th' joy it brings.

Jus' common stuff. That I'll admit,
But if th' writin' will help a bit
T' bid good cheer come in an' sit
Right down, I'm a thinkin' it
Won't be no waste of a feller's time,
An' that is th' very reason I'm
A goin' to keep on day by day
Writin' stuff in my poor, weak way;
An' if th' writin' will make smiles play
On one sad face, then all I'll say
Is, I'm content; f'r one who tries
Don't care f'r them that criticise.

Sing o' th' common things o' life;
Laughin' chil'run, o' home an' wife;
F'rgettin' awhile th' cares an' strife
With which this bustlin' world is rife.
Sing in a style that some may say
Is rough an' homely. But anyway
Th' style suits me, an' I'm satisfied
With jus th' fact o' havin' tried
T' scatter a few smiles fur an' wide,
Or havin' a few o' life's tears dried.

The Christmas Tree

I'd like to be a boy again—
Christmas trees grew brighter then.

The first Christmas tree, like the first circus, will always be held in memory as the biggest, brightest and best. As you grow older and have children of your own you get more joy out of Christmas giving than you ever did out of Christmas receiving, but somehow or other you never can make your children's Christmas tree look quite so lovely and bright as the first one you remember. Today's cranberries are not so red as they used to be, and today's popcorn won't string as beautifully as it once did. And somehow or other you never could get quite such a pretty effect these days with tinsel and gilt as you used to get with cranberries and popcorn.

The Christmas presents of long ago would be very much out of place now. We are getting to be so artistic, you know. And it may be that we are becoming rather shoddy. Thirty years ago the average family Christmas tree was loaded with knit mittens, knit scarfs, crochet neckties, perforated cardboard mottoes worked in zephyr, comfortable wearing apparel, boots, shoes, and things like these. It is different today. The child of thirty years ago was made supremely happy by receiving a pair of the old-fashioned wood-bottomed "rocker" skates. They must be club skates today. Then a home-made windmill was a joy. Today it must be a mechanical toy run by springs of electricity—preferably the latter. Thirty years ago a little drum and a tin trumpet were enough to fill a boy's days with delight. Now it takes a lot more. And the children of today don't get a bit more fun out of Christmas than we used to get thirty or forty years ago.

It always is a joy to see
The fruit upon a Christmas tree.

In 1885 an American promoter with more cash than judgment conceived the idea of starting a daily newspaper in Caracas, Venezuela. All he knew about Caracas he had learned from encyclopedias, but he was convinced that it had a future and sooner or later would be the greatest city in South America. He bought presses, type, and paper and shipped them to Caracas, then gathered his force of editors, reporters and printers. He had no trouble about getting men for he advanced transportation and gave bond for return passage at the end of six months to all who wanted to come back to the states. There were fifteen printers in the bunch—adventurous spirits who had worked from coast to coast and from lakes to gulf, and ready to go anywhere that promised something new.

It was late in October before the force arrived at Caracas, and it didn't take the seasoned printers long to discover that it wouldn't be six months before the return transportation would be handed over by a sadly disappointed promoter. Caracas was the most unpromising daily newspaper city imaginable. In the first place less than a thousand of its population could read English, and in the second place less than three thousand of the population could read any language. The merchants were all Spaniards and much given to putting off until next week the important things that should have been done week before last. It was no use to talk advertising to them. They just wouldn't listen. The prospect of securing more business through advertising frightened them, for more business meant more work, and more work meant less time for bull fights and siestas. But the promoter had plenty of nerve and tackled the hopeless job. He had some big advertisements from American manufacturers seeking a market in South America, and by judicious use of New York and New Orleans daily newspapers that usually arrived two months after publication the telegraph editor managed to get out his share of copy. It was a good thing for the force that the populace couldn't read English, for some of the stories turned in by the local staff were enough to start a riot on every corner. The newspaper venture lasted just two months. But that bunch of American newspaper men and printers were in Caracas on Christmas day, and they celebrated in American fashion.

The Christmas tree was a big rubber plant about twenty feet high, and it was decorated with candles surreptitiously secured by working on the innocence of a youngster who was supposed to carry them to a church for the Christmas mass. Everybody got a present, such as it was, the presents consisting chiefly of bananas, although the boys swapped pipes, rules, chewing tobacco, long Venezuela cigars that were something horrible to contemplate and dangerous to smoke, and little personal trinkets.

The force had been recruited from the northern states—probably because no southern men would have been so foolish as to undertake the business—and to these northerners a Christmas in the tropics was a novelty. It didn't seem a bit like Christmas to the men accustomed to snow and heavy underwear at that season of the year. They loafed around in light cotton duck suits and tried to find cool spots in which to rest from the extreme fatigue of mere living. There were no brilliantly lighted show windows in the stores, no vast collections of Christmas toys—nothing to look like Christmas except the church festivals, the processions, the dimly burning candles and the tinkle of the bells on the water boy's donkeys or the milkman's goats.

That Christmas settled the fate of the daily newspaper in Caracas. It might have lasted a month or two longer, but the Christmas season in that tropical country was enough for the northerners. The next day they waited on the boss in a body and suggested that they were so interested in his financial welfare that they really thought he ought to quit publication and send the bunch back home. It was a sensible suggestion and acted upon at once. The issue of December 27, 1885, was the last. It announced the paper's suspension, and on January 2 a happy gang of newspapermen, printers and pressmen boarded a tramp steamer bound for New Orleans. One of those printers hurried to his home in Missouri and reached there about the middle of February on the coldest day of the winter. But he was happy. The intense cold, the drifted snow and the sight of bare trees was to him a welcome home. And he bought a little evergreen tree and set it up in his mother's home and had a belated celebration that, at least, looked like Christmas.

At Christmas let each one be glad,
From lisping babe to gray-haired dad.

It's a mighty good thing that everybody is good natured during the Christmas season. Nobody gets mad if caught in a jam on the street cars, or elbowed in the aisles of a big store. If it happened at any other time of year there would be growls and mutterings and perhaps personal encounters. But now you get on the car with both arms and all pockets loaded down with bundles, and you hang on by your eyebrows without a protest. When a neighbor is thrown against you by a lurch of the car you don't say naughty things and shove him back; you just smile at him and he returns the smile, and then you say.

"Everybody looks happy."

"You bet. Hope you have a merry Christmas."

"Thanks, old man; same to you."

And then the incident is closed.

If you happened to bump up against a man in that way in a crowd in Caracas the chances are that there would be the flashing of a knife and a sudden need for the services of a surgeon. Those South Americans are great on formal politeness that does not count for anything, but when it comes right down to brass tacks they are the limit of sudden anger and quick use of weapons.

Tom Bowles never came back from Caracas. Without kith or kin, his bones lie buried in the little American cemetery on the outskirts of that city, and no stone marks the spot. He died after a too intimate acquaintance with Spanish politeness. It occurred about the middle of December. The printer force quit about 2 a. m., and naturally drifted to a place where the coolest could be obtained. A bunch of Spanish rounders were in the place, and Tom accidentally trod upon the toes of one. Before he could apologize a knife was sheathed in his side. It was never known who committed the murder, for it was impossible to make a Spaniard testify against another Spaniard who had put a "gringo" out of commission. But in less than twenty seconds after it happened there were a dozen or more Spaniards who were candidates for the hospital, and the proprietor was mournfully gazing upon the ruins of his establishment. Tom was buried by his companions, the funeral services being conducted by the local Presbyterian missionary and attended by the few Americans in business there. Tom's companions have never forgotten. In a dozen American cities during the Spanish-American war were printers who danced with joy when they got the news of Dewey's victory at Manila and Schley's victory at Santiago—not because they were unusually patriotic, but because it meant to them that poor Tom Bowles, one of the best fellows who ever edged up an "em" or "soldiered for a phat take," had been amply revenged.

Arise and sing with fervent glee—
Behold the glowing Christmas tree.

How we wish that all children in all the wide world could open their eyes on Christmas morning and behold a Christmas tree laden with the things most calculated to please them!

Christmas—the season of good will, of generosity, of peace. The great day will soon be here again. And as we contemplate with what patience we can muster its approach, we smile and say in the language of Tiny Tim: "God bless us, every one!"

MEXICO AND GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP

The Mexican government has entered the field of public ownership.

Associated Press dispatches follow:

City of Mexico, Dec. 14.—The details of the railway merger, by which the Mexican government takes control of the independent lines in the republic are now known. By the terms of the contract the government secures absolute control of the Mexican Central, the National, the International, the Interoceanic and the Hidalgo & Northeastern, all of which will be merged into one great railroad system. The government also comes into control of the Texas-Mexican, a railroad at Laredo, Texas, which is owned by the National. The mileage of the system will, with extensions which are rapidly nearing completion, aggregate approximately ten thousand miles. The Tehauntepec National and Vera Cruz & Pacific, two others controlled by the government, will continue to be run as independent companies.

A Mexican company, of which a majority of the stock will be held by the Mexican government, will be organized with headquarters in Mexico City. The company will issue its securities in exchange for the securities outstanding of the two companies and the new company will acquire all the physical property and concessions held by the old companies.

It is contemplated to create a board of twenty-one directors to be divided into a general board which will reside in Mexico and a local board with headquarters in New York. The board in Mexico will consist of twelve members and the New York board of nine.

The new company will make a limited issue of prior liens at 4½ per cent and general mortgage bonds at 4 per cent, the principal and interest of the latter being guaranteed by the Mexican government. In addition to the bond issue the company will issue first and second preferred and common stock. It is proposed to leave an ample reserve in cash and securities for future improvement, development and extension of the lines of the company and for the acquisition of additional rolling stock and motive power. The new company will take over the holdings of the National railroad of Mexico and the Mexican International