

STORIES  
POETRY

## The Inglenook

SKETCHES  
TRAVEL

## CHRISTINA'S HOLIDAY.

"I believe I can do it," said Christina. She made a few rapid calculations and shut her account book with an air of triumph. "Yes, I can," she declared, and then for a whole hour she sat and dreamed dreams of the holiday she had just planned.

Christina Graham was a typist in a London office. She was a gentle, refined looking girl, who, as her landlady was fond of saying, "had known better days."

She could not remember her mother, but for eighteen happy years Christina had been her father's idolized treasure, till the sudden failure of a big financial venture had put an end to those halcyon days. The shock, added to a heart already weak, practically killed Mr. Graham, and Christina found herself alone in the world.

When the creditors' claims had been met, there was a tiny nest-egg left, which would bring the orphan girl exactly forty pounds a year.

To make a long story short, Christina studied shorthand and typewriting with dogged perseverance, and finally obtained a post in the office of Messrs. Barham & Co.

Her salary was pitifully small, but when supplemented by her modest income, Christina managed somehow to make both ends meet.

She sat now in her tiny bed-sitting room, her hands clasped round her knees, and a far-away look in her eyes.

"I shall have to do without a summer dress," she said presently, addressing the oil-stove, "and that old straw hat must do duty again; I shall get a scrap of new ribbon for it though, and I absolutely must take my bicycle. What does it matter about clothes when there's only Nurse to see me, and she would love me in sackcloth?" And here Christina laughed, for she was young and healthy, and she had not had a holiday for three years.

Her plan was to go to Dalesmouth, a tiny Devonshire village, and stay in a little cottage by the sea, with her old nurse, Martha Dollins. Once, when Christina was ten, she had spent a whole month there with the kindly woman who had mothered her for the first seven years of her life. That month in Martha's cottage had been a happy, irrefragable time, and she was looking forward to just such another.

It was a glorious summer evening when Christina arrived at Dalesmouth. Martha welcomed her young lady with ecstasy; to her, at least, Christina was still a child, her nursing, who must be petted and made much of.

"It's good to see you, dearie," she exclaimed over and over again, as Christina sampled home-made scones and Devonshire cream.

"Have a morsel of treacle with it," counselled Martha; "that's what the folks round here do call 'thunder an' lightning.'"

So Christina ate "thunder and lightning" and enjoyed herself immensely.

"The young squire have come back from furrin' parts," said Martha presently. "'Tis lonely for him up at the Hall, I reckon, with no mother, nor nobody to see after him but Jane Collett, his housekeeper, and she's a poor tool if you like."

"Mr. Cecil have grown something considerable, as you have yourself, Miss Christle," continued Martha, waxing garrulous, "but free-an'-easy he is, same as ever. He stepped in to see me a week or two back, and it was on the tip of my tongue to ask him if he remembered the time when you and him played together in my back garden, and shovelled every bit of small coal out of the coal-house on to my bed of white lilies. You was a pair of pickles, and no mistake!" concluded Martha, laughing immoderately.

Christina laughed, too; she remembered the childish escapade very well, and felt a natural curiosity to see her old playmate again.

"Not that he would remember me," she told herself; "that's not at all likely."

The next day Christina was up betimes.

"Mornings at seven,

The hillside's dew-pearled."

she carolled merrily, as she spun along the country road on her bicycle. Every turn of the lanes revealed some fresh beauty; it was like getting into Fairyland to the girl who had spent the last three years in dingy lodgings. No wonder she wanted to make the most of the dew-spangled grass, and the hedges gay with wild roses and honeysuckle.

Christina went on gaily. Once she stopped to gather a big bunch of dog-roses; laughing at the thorns, she fastened the flowers to her handle-bars and rode on again.

She had been out for more than an hour before it occurred to her that the road seemed curiously unfamiliar.

"I ought to be getting back," she reflected. "Martha will be waiting to have breakfast. Can I have taken a wrong turning? Oh, there's a man with a motor. I must ask the way, I suppose."

The man was kneeling in the road doing something to the motor, but as Christina came up he rose to his feet saying, "Got him!" and was just going to jump in when he saw her.

"If you please," said Christina, "can you tell me the nearest way to Dalesmouth?"

"Certainly," said the young man politely. "You'll have to go back a mile or so, and turn—excuse me, haven't we met before somewhere? I seem to know your face perfectly."

Christina smiled. She had known the moment he turned around that this must be the young Squire, her old play-fellow; but before she could answer he came towards her with outstretched hands. "You needn't tell me," he cried, "of course I know now. It's Christina. My little playmate, Chrissie Graham! Why, Chris, where have you hidden yourself all these years? Are you staying with Martha Dollins? Here jump in, The Scarlet Runner will get you home in next to no time."

Christina laughed; it was delightful to be greeted like this. She got into the car, her bicycle was hoisted in too, and then they were off.

Before they reached Dalesmouth Cecil Tregarthen had gathered a very fair outline of Christina's history. His jolly, good-natured face grew grave as she spoke of her father's death; and though she touched lightly on her own loneliness, and said nothing at all about her poverty, it did not require much imagination to see that the world had not been particularly kind to her.

They chattered gaily, however, about old times until Sea Cottage came in sight, when The Scarlet Runner slowed up.

"Good-bye," said Christina at the gate; but the Squire corrected her.

"Au revoir," he said; and Christina went in to breakfast with shining eyes and quite an unusual color in her cheeks.

After that morning it was surprising how often The Scarlet Runner came tearing round the corner and stopped at the little gate. Indeed, as a matter of fact, Christina's bicycle had rather a dull time of it in the little shed at the back; but then, as Martha said, "A body can't ride in a motor-car every day," and Christina, remembering her life in London, said, "No, indeed," and determined to enjoy every single moment of the holiday that was slipping away so fast.

She began to make a collection of shells and seaweed to take back with her, and, strangely enough, whatever

part of the shore Christina favored, sooner or later a boyish face was sure to appear round a corner of the rocks, and Cecil Tregarthen would join in the hunt for treasures.

Martha Dollins, discreet and old-fashioned as she certainly was, indulged privately in a queer kind of smile when day after day the Squire dropped in just at tea-time because, as he explained, he was so fond of Martha's scones, and her "thunder and lightning" tasted better than other people's. It did not require much penetration to see that Cecil was about as much in love as a young man of five-and-twenty could well be!

"I won't think, I won't, I won't!" said Christina to herself when the last day of her holiday arrived. "I'll forget all about tomorrow. Oh, dear, how hateful London will seem after this!"

But though she would not admit it, even to herself she knew it was not the thought of leaving the hills and the rose-laden hedges that filled her eyes with scalding tears; an unaccountable feeling of loneliness tore at her heart, and Christina did not dare to analyze it.

She managed, however, to talk cheerfully to Cecil that last evening of all she meant to do on her return to town, and he listened gravely, trying to show sympathy with her plans, and failing in the attempt.

"I suppose you'll be very glad to get back," he said abruptly, slashing at some unoffending dandelions.

"Glad!"—Christina never knew how much pathos slipped into her voice—"glad to leave Dalesmouth? Oh, if you only knew how lonely London is!" Then she stopped, hoping it was too dark for him to see her face, when suddenly a warm hand took hold of hers.

"Dearest," said Cecil, "don't go. Stay here and look after me. I'm lonely too."

And Christina stayed.

## MAN AND BOY.

I, strolling along at forty,  
He, holding me by the hand.  
As he prattled his childish questions  
Of the things he would understand.  
I was thinking of years behind me,  
And he of the years ahead:  
"I wish I was grown up, father—  
An' what do you wish?" he said.

A dear, strong face was before me,  
As it was in the time gone by:  
I thought of our strolls together  
Underneath the old blue sky.

"I think I should like"—I answered  
In reply to his little talk—  
"To again be a boy for an hour,  
With my father out for a walk."

## BOOKS.

Never, under any circumstances, read a bad book; and never spend a serious hour in reading a second rate book. No words can overstate the mischief of bad reading.

A bad book will often haunt a man his whole life long. It is often remembered when much that is better is forgotten; it intrudes itself at the most solemn moments, and contaminates the best feelings and emotions. Reading trashy, second-rate books is a grievous waste of time, also.

In the first place, there are a great many more first rate books than ever you can buy; and, in the second place, you cannot read an inferior book without giving up an opportunity of reading a good one.

Books, remember, are friends; books affect character; and you can as little neglect your duty in respect of this as you can safely neglect any other moral duty that is cast upon you.—Coleridge.