

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

THE DAILY SURPRISE.

It had been a hard winter for the little household, more so than they could remember having experienced. True, Mr. Hudson hadn't been out of work, but provisions and fuel were higher, and—well, the children were growing older, and that meant a corresponding increase in the family expenditures.

"I don't know what we're going to do—I actually don't." 'Twas at the children's council, and Beth, the oldest, was speaking. "Next week, Monday—it might have waited till Saturday, it seems to me, just to accommodate us—is mother's birthday, and we haven't a thing prepared—not one!—and no money to get anything with."

She turned to the three serious faces in council assembled, with a pathetic expression of appeal.

"If you have a plan—can see any way of getting something—tell us quick! We've less than a week to do it in; for of course it's got to be made—we've no money—not a cent! And 'twould be awful not to give anything—just disgraceful."

The anxious chairman waited, and looked from one to another desperately.

"Can't anyone think? Try!"

How still it was! Each pair of eyes was fixed on the worn flowers in the carpet.

"What can we make?" She directed her remark to Phil.

"I don't know, unless—"

Beth drew a sign of relief—just a borderland sigh—for Phil was so full of resources. The other two members of the council, Nan and Ralph, looked up expectantly.

"Perhaps we couldn't do it—but I'd thought of a Daily Surprise. 'Twouldn't cost anything; I have cards enough—only work. 'Twould take lots of that."

"I don't mind how hard I'd have to work if we could get something," declared Beth, heroically. "We're willing to do that; but what is it—the Daily Surprise?"

They all looked curious.

"Well, we've no money—we can't buy anything. We haven't got things left over from Christmas or from our own birthdays that we could give; but we can give ourselves!"

"Our—what!" exclaimed Beth, wonderingly. "We're hers already."

"But I don't mean it that way," replied Phil. "I mean we can promise and plan beforehand to do things, and be ready for anything special she might wish to have done. Be a reserve corps which she could draw on for her own use."

And still the Daily Surprise wasn't exactly clear to the anxious councilors. They didn't quite understand.

"I'll get the things and show you, and then you will," and Phil ran up to his room for the box of thin white cards, hundreds of them, his Uncle Charles had given him when he went out of the printing business.

"Suppose we take seven—one week—and fix them now, all ready for the Surprise. Let-me-see; there are four of us."

He placed the cards on the table, and went out for the pen and ink.

"You see, they are all the same shape, and can be tied together. We'll want"—

"Three hundred and sixty-five," suggested Beth.

"Yes—one for each day till her birthday comes round again. Now I'll take Tuesday; that's the next day after we give it—when the surprise'll begin."

The others watched him very carefully while he wrote: "To-day I'm ready to do any extra work or errand or anything mother wants me to do. I'm her special attendant and helper to-day.—Phil."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Beth. "Now I see!"

"So do I!"

"And I!"

And the council, only a few moments before so anxious and worried, just bubbled over with happiness.

Beth took the next card and wrote, after the day and date: "Think how much you can allow me to do to-day. I want this forenoon and afternoon to take every burden from mother's shoulders.—Beth."

Then Nan took the pen, and her little face was so earnest: "I'm yours all to-day.—Nan."

"Ralph." Phil handed him a card.

"What is the first thing you want me to do to-day, mother? And while I am doing it, think of the next and the next and the next. I love you forever.—Ralph."

And the other three cards for the first week were written, all with tender tokens of regard and promises and hints and offered services.

All their spare moments during the remainder of the week the little council was assembled, and by Saturday night the Daily Surprise was finished.

"It's all we had to give you this year, mother, but we hope you'll like!"—

"Like it!" and the mother-voice was tenderly sweet. "It's the richest gift I've ever received—and she peeped slyly at the Tuesday Surprise—for it's a service prompted by willingness and love. I can hardly wait for my Daily Surprise to begin!"

MY WORK.

By Henry Van Dyke.

Let me but do my work from day to day,
In field or forest, at the desk or loom,
In roaring market place, or tranquil room;

Let me but find it in my heart to say,
When vagrant wishes beckon me astray—
"This is my work; my blessing, not my doom;

Of all who live, I am the one by whom
This work can best be done, in the right way."

Then shall I see it not too great, nor small,
To suit my spirit and to prove my powers;

Then shall I cheerful greet the laboring hours,
And cheerful turn, when the long shadows fall

At eventide to play and love and rest,
Because I know for me my work is best.

DUTIES WELL DONE.

We should not forget that no one ever did anything of great value to others without cost. A quaint old proverb says: "One cannot have an omelette without breaking eggs."

If we should do anything really worth while, that will be a blessing in the world, we must put into it not merely easy effort, languid sympathies, conventional good wishes, and courtesies that cost nothing—we must put into it thought, time, patience, self-denial, sleepless nights, exhausting toil. There is a legend of an artist who had found a wonderful red, which no other artist could imitate. The secret of this color died with him; but after his death an old wound was discovered over his heart. This revealed the source of the matchless hues of his pictures. The legend teaches that no great achievement can be made, no lofty attainment reached, nothing of much value to the world done, save at the cost of heart's blood.—J. A. Froude.

A MYSTERIOUS PERFUME.

By Emma C. Dowd.

It was Lois who first noticed it. She began to sniff as soon as she came in from school.

"What is it smells so good?" she asked. "What are you cooking?"

"Nothing but potatoes," her mother answered. "I guess it's the wood in the oven. The kindlings seemed damp this morning, so I put some in to dry."

"I never knew any wood smell like that; it's delicious."

"Oh, what are we going to have for dinner?" cried Elliott, bursting into the kitchen with a clatter and a bang. "I should think it was sassafras soup by the smell!" "Sassafras soup! What a boy!"

"Well, it would be good! What is it, anyhow?"

"It isn't sassafras, for there isn't a tree on the farm," laughed Lois. "I wish there were."

"Who's eating wintergreen candy?" asked little Sophie. "Give me some—do!" and the outer door opened and shut, letting in a whiff of fresh air.

"I declare, I believe I smell something new! It must be the wood." Mrs. Alford sniffed at the oven door. "I don't know whether it's here or not," she concluded; "but I must broil the steak—I know that!"

"Dinner smells good!" said the father, coming in breezily. "What is it this time—Banbury turnovers or orange shortcake?" The others laughed.

"We've all been fooled," answered Lois. "It's just beefsteak and potatoes and apple pie. Somebody has been perfuming the wood, I think. It ought to be the first of April."

After dinner Elliott inspected the oven. "I have it!" he exclaimed triumphantly, inhaling the odor up and down the length of a small stick. "It's this birch!"

The rest crowded around, and the wood passed from hand to hand.

"It smells just like wintergreen candy, anyway," insisted Sophie, "if you did laugh at me!"

"I remember there was a small black birch in the corner of that swamp we've been cleaning up," said Mr. Alford, "and this must be a piece of it."

"And Sophie isn't so far out of the way after all," put in Elliott, "for Mr. Thrall told me once that essence of wintergreen was often made from black birch."

"Well, I'm not going to have a bit of that burned up!" declared Lois. "We'll keep it to perfume the house. We can put it in that little oven on top of the parlor stove, and make everybody wonder what it is smells so good. It will be fun! Come on out to the wood shed, Elliott and Sophie, and let's pick out all we can find!"—Morning Star.

We shape ourselves the joy or fear
Of which the coming life is made,
And fill our future's atmosphere
With sunshine or with shade.
—Whittier.

Conversation is an art worth learning. Its keynote is unselfishness. To speak without trumpeting our opinions, and to listen without interrupting, are accomplishments which a selfish person finds difficult, but which must be learned before the charm of conversation commences.

Matrimony in Paisley is losing something of its ancient popularity. The number recorded during last year was 570, a decrease of 31 on the previous year.