

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

THE TESTING OF PHIL.

It was an extremely warm morning. Under the white awning in front of E. K. Hall & Son's large grocery store, protected from the rays of the July sun, were boxes of blueberries, ruddy currants, and juicy raspberries temptingly displayed.

Below on the neatly-swept walk were baskets of potatoes, green peas, radishes, and other vegetables that the early morning wagons had brought in before the dew was yet off the vines and plants.

One of the clerks of the firm, in spotless white apron and stiff paper cuffs, was spraying the bricks on either side the open door, to keep the surroundings cool and attractive. One of the older Mr. Hall's business maxims was: "Make things neat if custom you would keep."

"This must be the place," and Phil Holbrook stood hesitatingly under the protecting awning. "It's 2806—that's the number the advertisement said. Yes, this is E. K. Hall & Son's," slowly reading the gilt-lettered sign above the door.

The boy was poorly but neatly dressed. He wore a pair of gray trousers patched in one knee, a faded blue and white shirt, and shoes whose soles had been worn thin; his straw hat, too, was a trifle too large—one could easily see it had been bought for some one else.

There was an expression of eager anticipation not unmingled with anxiety on Phil Holbrook's face as he scanned the attractive fruit display before the open door.

"I'd like to handle such good things," he was thinking, "only they look almost too nice to sell!"

"Anything I can do for you, my boy?" The clerk, with the water sprinkler still in his hand, stood inquiringly before Phil. "Vegetables or fruit? We've an excellent assortment of both this morning."

"I'd like to, see—is Mr. Hall in please?" and Phil, slightly embarrassed, looked questioningly towards the door.

"Yes; Mr. Hall's always here early—want to see him?" pleasantly.

"If I may—if he's at leisure," quickly.

"Oh, I see—you're one of the boys who wants the place you saw advertised. Step in; I'll take you to Mr. Hall. There's one boy here before you this morning and I don't know how many tried yesterday—six or seven in all, I judge."

"And they didn't suit?" pressed Phil. "I'm afraid I'm—"

"You can't tell," interrupted the clerk, "till you try."

Phil noticed with what exactness the groceries and canned goods were arrang-

ed on either side the store as he entered. "I'd like to work here," was his hasty conclusion; "everything is in such splendid order."

"Mr. Hall," the clerk entered a small room at the rear of the store, where an elderly man sat writing. "excuse me; I've brought—I didn't ask your name," turning to Phil.

"Phil Holbrook, sir."

"He saw your advertisement in the Record."

"Sit down," Mr. Hall turned partly around; "I'll be at leisure in a moment."

Phil's ready eye was quick to take in the surroundings of the well-lighted room; but the most noticeable thing in the comfortably-furnished office was the motto over the door—it was in large old-English characters: "Be honest, even if it costs."

"That's one of mother's sayings," thought Phil. "I've heard her say that same thing—lots of times."

"Well, boy," Mr. Hall had finished his letter, "you saw my advertisement and wish for the situation. Ever been in a store?"

"No, sir," frankly. "I've lived in the country till three weeks ago."

"Think you're cut out for this kind of work, and such strict confinement?" and the keen business man looked at Phil critically; he seemed to read his able-to-do capacity at a glance.

"I'd like to try it, sir!" Phil met the searching gaze unflinchingly.

"Very well! My plan is to give boys an on-the-spot trial—it's the only one I regard as wholly satisfactory," laying down his pen.

"Coleman!" Mr. Hall stepped to the door. "Let this fellow take the raspberry trade—the table to the left; give him the necessary directions."

"Yes, sir," and Phil followed the clerk, whom Mr. Hall had summoned, to the front of the store.

"You may take this stand here; if any one wishes raspberries, they are fifteen cents a box. These are not very good—not nearly so fresh and firm as those outside; they've been in the store too long. Customers aren't always able to see the difference themselves—they look pretty well on top."

At the other side of the store Phil noticed another berry stand; behind it stood a boy about Phil's age. "Must be the other new fellow on trial," was his hasty mental conclusion.

While waiting for customers Phil examined the raspberries in the boxes before him.

"They're awfully poor—down in the middle," turning out against his hand one after another of the boxes of berries. "Look well enough on top, but they aren't fit to sell as good berries—not a single box of them—they're not worth it," and he frowned to himself.

"Are these fresh?" A lady had just come in and stood beside Phil's berry stand. "They look very nice. If they are fresh I should like three boxes."

"I—I think they're not, madame. They're pretty soft down towards the middle." It seemed for a moment to Phil that he was unfaithful to his temporary employer.

"But those outside the door are plump and fresh; aren't these like them?"

"Not so good a quality."

"Very well; I'll order the others as I go out," and Phil was left alone.

"I suppose I ought to have sold them—but they aren't good and I had to tell the truth," soberly. "I wonder how many the other fellow sold; I saw a woman a few minutes ago take two boxes. If he sells all of his and I don't sell any, he'll get the place," and Phil's face took on an anxious expression.

Later, three women in succession came in to buy berries, and each one left Phil's stand for the fresher ones outside under the awning.

"I just had to tell them that these were only fit for preserving when they asked me right fair and square!" Phil was getting discouraged.

"I don't believe I can sell a single box—and of course they'll not keep me. They'll want a fellow who's a salesman!"

"Are they as good all through as these on top?" questioned a man who came into the store on his way down town. "Mrs. Newcomb wanted me to send up two or three boxes for desert; I noticed some beauties outside. Are these the same?"

"They're of a better quality out there," stammered Phil, growing red in the face.

"I don't believe I want these, then," and the busy doctor went out of the store and left his order with Coleman.

"I haven't disposed—of a—box!" It was five minutes before twelve, and Phil had been summoned into Mr. Hall's office.

"Well, what luck?" Mr. Hall looked up inquiringly.

"I haven't sold any," confessed Phil, slowly.

"No? Hadn't any chances?" Phil felt the older man's eyes fixed searchingly on him.