

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS.

By H. Isobel Graham.

While to the majority of people Christmas means joy and festivity there are many, unfortunately, to whom the word has no such significance. Gladly would they blot the day out of their calendar for it only recalls friends and love and pleasures that have faded forever out of their lives. At no time of the year is the vacant chair more apparent or does the crepe hang heavier upon the door of the heart. The "loved and lost awhile" draw very near, so near that the old heart hunger for "the sound of a voice that is still" sweeps over us with such terrific and irresistible force that we shrink from and almost forget the very suggestion of Christmas, feeling that "it were better sweeter to forget" to such we would say:

The Yule-tide may not bring to thee,
Glad mirth and music as of yore,
But open wide the grief-closed door,
Of thy sad heart, that forth from
thee,

May issue streams of sympathy,

That shall refresh some arid plain,
In other hearts bowed down by pain,
And bid the roses bloom again.

There are those, too, whose lot is cast so far from the old roof-tree that it is impossible for them to make one of the happy number gathered around the glowing hearth.

There are others also in hospitals and homes, sick, suffering or friendless, mayhap, to whom Christmas is almost a mockery. It is to all such that my heart goes out in sympathy, and I pen these lines in the hope that they may bring a ray of strength and comfort to some heart that is weary because of the way. Paul had discovered the secret of self-mastery when he wrote "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." He did not say happy; contentment is possible where happiness may not be.

There is no life so miserable or lonely or loveless that it does not contain many compensations and blessings for which to be thankful. Suppose we were deprived of everything except health of body and soundness of mind, we still would have sufficient cause for gratitude to God every moment of our days. Should life furnish us personally with no very great incentive for a prolonged existence, there are always plenty of people to cheer and help. No person is such an obscure or insignificant member of society but he or she can contribute a large quota to the sum total of human happiness.

"No stream from its source flows, seaward, how lonely soever its course but some land is gladdened. No star ever rose and set without influence somewhere; who knows what earth needs from earth's lowest creature. No life can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife and all life not so purer and stronger thereby.

Someone has said that Christianity is a peculiar product, the more we give the more we get. It is so with happiness "in blessing others we ourselves are blest." Let us launch farther out into the deep of self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness at this blessed Christmas season.

"We are not here to play, to dream, to drift. We have hard work to do and loads to lift. Snun not the struggle, face it, tis God's gift. Be strong, be strong.

Seaforth, Ont.

A VISIT TO THE MOON.

(From an address to a Young People's Guild.)

By Rev. J. J. Elliot, B.A.

There is no water in the moon, and very little air, so that in paying a visit to our satellite we must imagine ourselves able to exist without these prime necessities. It does not follow that the moon is entirely without life, for the creator can doubtless devise an infinite number of ways by which life may be maintained. But inasmuch as the telescope brings the moon within the apparent distance of fifty miles, and not the slightest change has been noted on its surface since telescopes were first turned to the skies, we may safely conclude that we are going to visit a dead world. It is not easy to realize at first what this implies. The most barren and forsaken deserts of this world convey only the slightest idea of the lonely desolation of the moon. It is a world of gigantic mountains, with here and there broad deep valleys strewn with innumerable rocks and boulders. The absence of an atmosphere gives it a character of its own. There is not a sound, not a breath to disturb the silence. The stillness is absolute. We are in a world that can fling defiance to the teeth of time. There is neither moss nor lichen to soften the harsh and rugged features of these ancient rocks. The power of gravitation is slight, only one sixth of the constant pull to which life on the earth has accustomed us. Slender shafts and pinnacles of stone that would topple over with the faintest vibration remain as they were left untold millenniums ago when the internal fires of the planet died out forever. It is a world of sharp contrasts and violent extremes. There is no soft blue sky, no rosy dawn coming over the hills and creeping down into the valleys, no twilight, nothing but black darkness or the glare of fierce sunshine. The long lunar day is insufferably hot. Tortured with a temperature that would raise water above the boiling point you seek the shelter of a rock only to shiver and freeze with the cold. It has been seriously calculated that the difference in temperature between the lunar midday and midnight cannot be less than five hundred degrees.

A distinctive feature of lunar scenery is the famous ring mountains, hundreds of which have been noted and carefully scrutinized. Their appearance is such as to suggest that in some far distant age a terrific bombardment of meteors full of holes. The typical example of these strange objects is "Tycho" which may be seen with an opera glass any clear night when the moon is near the full. It is the jewel that sparkles on the neck of the Moon Maiden, sometimes irreverently called "The Gibson Girl." Her handsome profile may be traced very clearly. Her dark eye is a cavernous valley among the mountains. Vast depressions that may have been the beds of primeval seas furnish her with luxuriant hair. The string of brilliants in her dark tresses is a chain of mountains some of which are twenty thousand feet in height. Let us scale the ramparts of the extinct volcano, Tycho. The task is quite easy for you are wonderfully light footed in the moon. It is in this respect a paradise for stout people. A ponderous gentleman who weighs three hundred pounds on the earth will only weigh fifty on the moon. So up we go with giant strides till we peer over the edge of the crater into the gulf below. The walls go almost sheer down for seventeen thousand feet, more than three miles. A dense black shadow cast by the sun extends far out over the circular plain enclosed by these giant walls. The huge circle is fifty-four miles in diameter, and in the centre there stands a craggy peaked mountain over a mile in height.

The sun in the meantime has sunk in the west, and the long day equal to fifteen of our days is just closing.

"The sun's rim dips; the stars rush out,

At one stride comes the dark." A million stars spring out of the dark vault above, and the great globe of the earth many times larger than the moon swings into view, always in the same position directly overhead. Its seas and continents all distinctly outlined, pass in review once in twenty-four hours, repeating the process fifteen times in the long lunar night. If the moon was ever peeped with reasoning beings like ourselves doubtless this phenomenon gave rise to curious speculation — probably the common sense people would hold to the view that Luna was the centre of the universe, and that Earth was a celestial time piece expressly designed to mark the passing of the hours.

Taken altogether the moon is a strange, weird and frightful world. We are glad to return to our own beautiful planet where a kind Creator has spread a canopy to shelter us from the frost and heat, lapping us in gentle airs, and clothing the nakedness of the rocks and plains with trees and flowers and fruit.

Midland, Ont.

CHRISTMAS FLASHES.

I see a flash of light from the long-ago. It is the first century signaling to the twentieth. Christmas to-day shines with the same star that made radiant the one on which Christ was born. Only has that star increased in luster. Also are there more wise men following its telegraphic beams. The same angel-song is throbbing in the air. But now the melody of that song falls upon a greater number of listening ears. Many have learned its marvelous harmonies. That choral is mingled in these times with the pulsing notes of church-bells; with the trembling vibrations of orchestras; with the blowing breach of trumpets; with the rolling thunder of organs, and with the softer carols of multiplied human tongues. The hour hastens when every clime shall send its pilgrims to the feet of the world's rightful King; when every point of the compass shall waft its incense of prayer to His throne; when every tribe and nation shall lift to Him the hands of adoration. O Thou of the manger, of the cross, of the tomb, speed Thy chariot-wheels and quickly come Thy crowning!

Christmas is the silver hammer that smites the flint of selfishness and splits it into fragments. It is the crucible that melts many a Scrooge into a philanthropist. This is the season of the year when nearly everybody thinks of some one else. The stores have been thronged with purchasers. Many a mysterious bundle has been carried home and smuggled into the house. Accustomed frowns have been frightened from the brow by the smiles that have come out upon the lips, born in the heart, like sunbeams peeping through clouds of storm. The ice of egotism has been broken down and dissolved in running off into myriad streams of generosity. The day of Christmas dawns with the glory of a benevolence that plays around many a fireside and warms many a life.

What is the meaning of it all? Why, it is heaven overflowing with the tides of good will, those tides backing up into the rivers of earth that so often run with muddied waters. It is the old melody of Bethlehem skies overmastering human discord. It is the manger of the Christ-child, which was a rudely fashioned earthen casket that held God's present of love to mankind, sending its influence abroad, that influence reaching its fingers clear through the hard shell of self-interest and bringing forth the kernel of kindness.