



JUVENILE CHRISTMAS STORY COMPETITION.

ANY of the young readers of the NEW ZEALAND GRAPHIC who are under sixteen, are invited to write a story for this competition. These are the rules:—

1. All competitors must be under 16.
2. Three prizes will be given.

FIRST.—A YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION TO 'THE GRAPHIC,' FROM JANUARY 1ST, 1892.

SECOND.—HALF-A-YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION.

3. The story must have something about New Zealand in it, and be written on one side of the paper only. It must not contain more than three thousand words, which would be about two columns of THE GRAPHIC, and must be original.
4. The manuscript must be addressed to the 'Lady Editor, GRAPHIC Office, Auckland,' and must not bear the writer's name, but a motto. The motto must be written on the outside of an envelope which contains the name and address in full. The envelope must not be enclosed with the MS., but must be posted separately.
5. All stories must reach the GRAPHIC Office by November 28th. The prize-winners will be published in the New Year's number. Any others considered good enough will be published later on.

ON WRITING STORIES FOR COMPETITION.

(BY THE LADY EDITOR.)

FIRST, you must think of some incident about which you can write a story. You may be fortunate enough to know some pretty Maori legend which will work up into an interesting tale; or you have heard your parents or friends tell of the funny things that happened in the early days of the colony; or the dangers they ran in the Maori war; or the accidents that befell them before New Zealand became as civilized as it is now; or you may have been on an expedition, and had some amusing or exciting adventure; or you can invent something 'out of your own head,' as the little ones say.

Do not have too many people in your story. They are apt to get mixed up, and puzzle the reader as to their identity. You should not introduce one character that is not necessary to help you to tell your story clearly.

Do not use long words when shorter ones will answer the purpose.

Try and make the people in your story talk and act just like the people you come across every day. You do not often meet some of the story-book people who tear their hair, and weep tons of tears which do not redden their eyes, but make them look even more beautiful than before.

Write naturally and easily, but certainly not slovenly. By this I mean, do not use the same word continually in successive sentences. This is frequently done, as, for instance, I might write: 'The frequent employment of a certain word frequently spoils a paragraph, when if other words had been employed a certain frequent feeling of annoyance would not have spoiled the reading of the paragraph.' Do you see what I mean?

Again, remember to write distinctly, and to mind your stops. Always begin a sentence with a capital letter. Always, when you want to show that some one is speaking, use inverted commas, and begin a fresh line.

'I hope you will all read this,' said Mr Brown, merrily.

'Of course we shall,' the children laughingly answered.

Again, write in ink, and on white paper. Lately I read a long MS. on painfully bright green paper, and actually written in pencil.

One word more. Fasten your carefully-numbered pages together at the top left hand corner, and always leave a little blank space there, so that when your MS. is read it may not be necessary to remove the fastener in order to puzzle out the words which it conceals.

Finally, try, all of you, and may you have great success in your literary labours.

COMFORT OF FRIENDSHIP.

To lie in calm content
Within the gracious hollow that God made
In every human shoulder, where He meant
Some tired head for comfort should be laid.

CELIA THAXTER.

A LITTLE DOSE OF POISON.

BY MARGARET VANDEGRIFT.



HE was usually a cheery little body, but for the last day or two she had been mournful, and, as her brothers were quick to discover, peculiarly susceptible to teasing. There was no apparent cause for this unhappy state of affairs. The summer vacation had begun, the weather was all that anybody could ask, and she was in good health.

'Don't you feel well, dear?' her mother asked as Laura, with an unpleasantly resigned expression, began to gather up the dinner dishes for washing. Monday was a busy day, and the one servant could not do everything.

'Yes, thank you, mamma, quite well,' answered Laura, and her downcast eyes did not see the quick little smile which flitted across her mother's face. 'Mamma' was a recently bestowed title; it had been 'mother' until two days ago.

A sudden recollection made Mrs Burton ask: 'What became of that illustrated paper that you found on the porch last week?' 'I wanted to save the large picture; it was really pretty.'

'It is up in my room. Shall I get it?' But there was a reluctance in the question which the mother noticed.

'It will be time enough when you have finished the dishes. Did you find anything interesting in the paper?'

'Oh, yes!' and Laura's voice suddenly became animated. 'There was a very interesting story.'

'Now if you can remember it well enough to give me an outline of it,' said Mrs Burton, 'it will beguile the time of the dish-washing very pleasantly. Can you?'

'Oh, yes,' replied Laura unhesitatingly. She had a good memory and an agreeable voice, and she liked both to read aloud and to recite from memory. 'It was called "A Trodden Heart,"' she began, and somehow the title, which had seemed to her so romantically sweet, sounded just a little foolish, but she went on. 'The heroine, Imogene Desespoir, writes her story herself. She was left an orphan when she was very young—almost a baby—and she inherited a great estate and an immense fortune in money, which she was to have when she was eighteen; but she was to have ever so much to spend in the mean time. Her father's cousin was to be her guardian, but though the father had believed him to be a very good man, and had trusted him entirely, he was really a rascal, and he meant to manage so that he could steal the money a little at a time, and then, when she had nothing to go to law with, to show a forged will, and seize the estate.'

'Excuse me for interrupting you, dear,' said Mrs Burton, 'but I am afraid your author was inspired by the mournful ballad of "The Babes in the Wood."

'Oh, I don't think so, mamma,' replied Laura, eagerly. 'It's quite different. You see this was her cousin, not her uncle, and there wasn't anything about a forged will in "The Babes in the Wood." Well, she grew up radiantly beautiful, so beautiful that everybody who saw her fell in love with her, and was ready to die for her.'

'And she mentions this herself' inquired Mrs Burton, smiling. 'My dear child, what would you think of a woman who told you such a thing as that? Should you consider her refined, or even well-bred?'

Laura was truthful. 'No, mamma, I shouldn't. But, you see, it sounds very different as she tells it in the book. I didn't think how it would be in reality. I suppose it would be just as bad for a person—a real person—to tell how many lovers she had, and what they said to her, and what she said to them. I don't know how it is—it all seems to come different as I tell it, like the verses in *Wonderland*. Do you want me to finish, mother?'

'Yes, dear, I do. I want you to see what the story really is stripped of its high-flown style and put into your every-day thoughts; but you may condense as much as you please, for the dishes are nearly done.'

'Well, then, she was very fond of her guardian until he was so cold and—unpleasant that she couldn't be any longer; and he stole the money, just as he meant to; and then all her lovers and all her friends but one old servant simply didn't have anything more to do with her at all. It wasn't natural; people's friends don't really behave so. It seems as if it was just put in to make the story. She went to live with the old servant, and she kept selling her jewels till they were all gone, and at last she was so poor that she took in washing from a boarding-house, and in the pocket of a linen coat she found a sealed letter directed in her guardian's writing to a very bad lawyer, and it was a statement of just how he meant to manage about the money and all the rest.'

'A sealed letter, did you say?' inquired Mrs Burton. 'Why, yes, mother. Oh, I never thought; I was so interested in the story. What kind of a thing must she have been to read a sealed letter plainly directed to somebody else? I don't wonder her friends deserted her. I'll make short work of the rest of her; it's too silly for anything. She got it all back, of course, and then she wouldn't let them put her guardian in gaol, and the lover she liked best—Lord Deforest—came back from India, and the lover she liked best had been obliged to go away just after she had lost her money, but that he had really loved her all the time. I don't see how she could believe him now, though it seemed quite natural as I read it. So they were married.'

'And after palaces and castles and noble lords and thrilling poverty, a nice big cheerful farm-house and an every-day loving father and mother and brothers and good health and pleasant friends seemed quite too commonplace and tiresome to be enjoyed,' said Mrs Burton.

Laura looked as she felt—astounded. 'Oh, mother,' she said, 'I didn't put it just that way, but I did think it was stupid never to have anything happen; just to keep on, day after day and year after year, doing the same commonplace things over and over again.'

'And yet,' said Mrs Burton, 'this is just what by far the larger number of the people in the world must do, and this is why, it seems to me, stories which represent life as a series of striking events and startling adventures often do so much harm to people who do not do their own thinking. I am glad to believe, dear, that you have, at least, begun to think, so I will not say any more about the unintended

HOW MANY?

READERS who are quick at figures may be interested in a conundrum.

'I am now visiting regularly,' said Doctor Garcelon, 'a family composed of the following relatives, all living under one roof:—

'One great-grandmother, two grandmothers, three mothers, one grandfather, one father, three sons, one great-grandson, one grandson, six sisters, six daughters, one daughter-in-law, two great aunts, five aunts, one uncle, three brothers, one widow, one stepdaughter, four granddaughters, one great-granddaughter, one great-grandson, two wives, one husband, one grandnephew, one grandniece, four nieces, two nephews.

'The question is,' said the doctor, 'how many people are there in the house?'

A GREAT STAMP COLLECTOR.

THE Duke of Edinburgh is a great stamp collector, and has stamps which are worth a very large sum of money. Officers in the navy who know his Royal Highness's weakness for these valuable little pieces of paper collect those of what-ever foreign station they may be at and send them to the Royal Admiral, says the *London Truth*. There is one private collection in England which has been valued at £50,000; and even the heads of the magnificent house of Rothschild are not above investing considerable sums in the purchase of rare and valuable stamps. The German stamps of the old pattern will be of no value in circulation after March next. A complete set of them will, however, be very useful in a collection, and efforts are being made to secure these for many of our best known collectors.



A WISE RESOLUTION.

TEACHER (natural history class): 'You will remember, will you, Tommy, that wasps lie in a torpid state all the winter?'

Tommy (with an air of retrospection): 'Yes, but they make up for it in summer.'

A TOAD'S TONGUE.

HOW IT IS USED TO CATCH THE UNSUSPECTING FLY TO FEED THE TOAD.

THE toad, which is one product of the tadpole, has some wonderful peculiarities. Did you ever see this clumsy and rather lazy-looking hopper in the act of catching a fly? He darts his tongue out several inches, so quickly that you can hardly see it, and with all its activity the fly hasn't the ghost of a chance to escape. How does the toad do this? You may have heard the saying that a terman's tongue is hung in the middle and thus wags at both ends. In the case of the toad the tongue is hung exactly the reverse of the human tongue, that is to say, the fastening is at the front of the jaw, while the loose end hangs backward to the throat. Now, when the lazy toad sights a fly he works his way up to it slowly until he gets within range for his tongue-shooter. Then he suddenly opens his mouth, the tongue flies out like a line from a fishing-pole, it strikes the fly and a glutinous substance on the tongue holds the victim until it is dumped into the toad's capacious mouth.

Another strange thing about the toad is that if its mouth be kept open the animal will suffocate. This is because it has no ribs and no means of dilating its chest, and therefore it must swallow air as it swallows food. If its mouth be forcibly kept open the air will pass to the stomach instead of entering the lungs. There is one variety of toad that has no tongue at all. It inhabits dark places in Guiana and Surinam. The way in which the eggs of this animal are hatched is as wonderful as its lingual peculiarity. The male toad places the eggs in little pits on the back of his spouse and affixes a lid for each pit. Then the female goes about her household duties something in the style of an Indian squaw with a papoose strapped upon her back. After some days little toadlets are hatched from the eggs on the maternal back, and when they are strong enough they force the lids off the pits and hop out.