

LIFE'S LITTLE LAUGHS

BY

MELESINA SETON CHRISTOPHER

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Capt. A. C. Seton Christopher,
Chelsea 1925

PREFACE

SHORTLY before her death in May, 1924, my wife had begun to arrange some of her Essays and Articles with a view to publication in book form.

'Small Gardens in London,' which concludes this collection, appeared in *The Garden* of May 3, 1924, and was the last she ever wrote.

She had written the Introduction, and it was her intention to revise some of the following Essays. They are now published just as she left them, by the desire of her many friends and in the endeavour to carry out as much as possible what she had hoped to do.

It is difficult for me to write of her, but by the kind permission of the *Spectator* I quote a letter which appeared in the issue of June 7, 1924, and I take this opportunity of tendering my grateful thanks to the anonymous writer for this touching tribute to a singularly beautiful character.

[To the Editor of the SPECTATOR.]

SIR,—Many readers of the *Spectator* mourn in a common sorrow the unexpected and irreparable loss of Mrs. Seton Christopher, who died on May 22nd. Her writings in your columns and elsewhere were typical of the varied channels through which her wide experience and kindly understanding flowed. All who came in touch with her found the same quick, strong sympathy, whether in joy or in sorrow.

Her home was one of friendship's happiest centres, and from it her many interests and activities radiated east and west. That Mercedes Christopher was a Lady of Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem speaks for her War service. In time of peace her music brought cheer to rich and poor, her love of Nature found expression alike in her sketches of

Italy and her work in her little Chelsea garden. Her wit was spontaneous and original; among any company outeasie from her, at the right moment, the precise word or phrase which illuminated and fixed the impression. As a niece of the late Archbishop Trench an inheritance of some gifts was to be expected; to these was added growth of character that shone through all she said and did, character that was founded on a firm faith and permeated with a deep sense of duty. The memory she leaves is one of faithful service to her God and of loving kindness to her fellows.—I am, Sir, &c.,

ONE WHO KNEW HER MANY YEARS.

It only remains for me to thank the owners of *The Cornhill Magazine*, the *Spectator*, *The Times*, *Books of To-day and To-morrow*, the *Commonwealth*, *Eve*, the *Weekly Westminster*, the *National Review*, and *The Garden* respectively for their kind permission to reprint some of these pages already published by them.

ALFRED SETON CHRISTOPHER.

March, 1925.

INTRODUCTION

MANKIND alone is endowed with the gift of joyous laughter, and it follows, as surely as day succeeds night, that there is always plenty of material to keep the faculty in good repair.

The little things that give us cause for happy laughter lie about us on all sides. Like gossamer strands, they catch the eye here and there and float in and out of life's more serious demands. Each may lay hold of the delicate thread that appeals, and sometimes it is possible to pass it into another's hand.

To even the most limited and enclosed of lives there come at times the enchantingly inconsequent chat of children, the occurrence of unexpectedly delightful actions on the part of animals, or the enlivening point of view of those whose vision of life may be at a slightly different angle to their own. Then there are the light touches that travel brings, and, added to all this ebb and flow, the perpetual ball of conversation being tossed about from one to another. In this give and take, the gay colour and sparkle of wit and humour may at any moment sweeten and lighten the commonplaces of life.

In some of these pages I have tried to catch a few of the bright strands that have danced round my own path, hoping that there may be some glad to have a few of these sayings and stories thus captured, and who will be ready to laugh a little with me.

MELESINA SETON CHRISTOPHER.

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LIFE'S LITTLE LAUGHS

PART I

AT THE BACK OF THE CHILD MIND

THIS is a region into which the 'grown-up' has no right of entry, and no key to turn the lock. Only now and then a flash may disclose the inner recesses, and throw a sudden light on an entirely surprising line of thought. A child frequently cherishes a theory of its own, which appears quite reasonable, for the enchanted precincts within, where the supernatural obtains as ready an acceptance as the commonplace. A thoughtful little boy of my acquaintance was asked the usual question, what he was going to be. He answered with great decision: 'Oh! a land-angel, of course, like daddy.' And I think 'daddy,' and the land-agency profession, scored a compliment. Time does not exist for children, who worry over no human limitations. A little girl saying her hymn, 'There is a green hill far away,' was thrilled to hear that her mother knew the lady who wrote it. Then she repeated her psalm, and added gravely: 'And did you know David, too?'

The train of thought is rather charming which led a little boy, when told not to mention a guest's amputated foot, to say: 'No, and when I get to Heaven, I won't say anything to John the Baptist about his head.' Surely politeness could go no further! Often an entirely different mental image is conjured up in the child's mind from that

suggested by the grown-up story-teller. One mother, recounting at great length the details of the illness of a little dog to her small girl, several times mentioned 'the dog doctor.' She was surprised, at the very end, by the question: 'What *sort* of dog was the dog doctor?' It was as well also that the child, who frequently repeated the hymn in which occur the lines, 'And Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees,' should at last have been prompted to ask: 'But what was the little saint doing on Satan's knees?' For many years a small girl known to me held the belief that there was a land where an exceedingly useful little animal ran about. This notion was only dispelled one Sunday morning by her inquiring which was the country 'where the little sausages live.'

Natural history is allowed great latitude in the child mind, and I have been asked to draw 'a mother engine and a lot of little tecny engines.' One mite of a girl, told that the three well-known feathers were 'the Prince of Wales's,' murmured longingly: 'I *should* like to see that birdie.' For easy acceptance of things a trifle unusual it is hard to beat the small boy looking at the bust of his late grandfather—the bust mounted on a little circular stand. Having asked his mother if grandpapa was very wise and good, he added: 'And was that all there was of grandpapa?'

It is never safe to count on a child's imagination. Sometimes things will be fitted into what is already known so literally, that the grown-up explanation finds itself high and dry. 'What do the angels have for dinner?' asked one child; and when hastily informed, by a rather shocked mother, that angels 'never have dinner,' the child said: 'Then I suppose they always have an egg with their tea.' Another, wishing to have the subject of the 'fatted calf' more fully explained, when told that it was what we called 'veal,' said suddenly: 'Oh, mummy, not veal at a party!'

It is curious how sometimes question and answer between 'grown-up' and child entirely miss their mark. A lady saying to a little girl: 'I hear you were born in India—what part?' received the somewhat unexpected reply: 'Oh! all of me.'

Children's imaginations can, however, lead them into strange anxieties, seldom confided to their older relations. On one occasion, two small, curly-headed boys were wise, and brought their trouble to their mother. It was to the effect that, hearing their father, a clergyman, spoken of as seriously ill, they wished to know, if he died should they 'have to have St. John's,' as they 'did not want it.' It might lead to some curious situations if churches were indeed hereditary.

The chance conversation of its elders must often give a child wonderful secret thoughts. A little modern maid was listening to her parents talking of the beauties of natural science, when she suddenly exclaimed: 'How wonderful Mother Nature is!'—and then very seriously: 'Is she God's wife?'

So a child's mind ranges wide, untrammelled by time or space, and only very occasionally is a glimpse vouchsafed into the land of childhood's dreams.

22, BURLINGTON SQUARE,
CHESHAM, ENGL.

3. July. 25.

Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure in
sending for your kind acceptance
a copy of "Life's Little Laughs"
by the late Mr. Seton Christophers,
(recently published by Messrs
Longmans Green & Co.)

You will see on Page 111.

FRANCIS & TAYLOR
5, "12, ABOLITION

That there is an article
relating to Chelsea.

Yours faithfully

A. C. Selous Christopher

Captain Retired

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