

The Fireside.

CLOTHING THE LORD IN PATCHES.

Luella Eliza was an old maid. All whom she could claim as her own by ties of blood had passed beyond the touch of her leaning affection. She was thinking of all this—and on them—on the morning when she was fifty-four years old. Upon the chair before her lay a heap of warm woollen clothing. The clothes had been her mother's, and until to-day they had been kept too sacred for any uses except reverent touches and reverent tears. But now a crisis had come, and they must be taken from their chest.

In her lap was a smaller pile of her own, worn through a number of winters. From this heap she picked up one garment after another, and examined each with a practical eye.

"Nothin' but rags," she said of one. "It'll have to go. The carpet rag-bag's gapin, for it. But this," she continued, thinking aloud—"les' see—knees worn bad, but by patchin' it'll last through another winter. I'll mend it. Old Mis' Andrews 'ez got the rheumatism in her knees. Will it be good enough for her?" holding it out critically. "Yes, with a patch or two, it'll be warmer than new."

She went on, sorting and selecting, assigning one garment to the piece-bag, another to some one of her "little sisters" among the poor.

Then she turned to the pile in front of her. A gush of tears came.

"Oh, mother!" she sobbed, "if you knew, you wouldn't blame me for wearin' your clo'es. I haven't had work for a month, and I've lived on corn mush and beans because they were cheap"—she shivered a little although the warm tears were falling—"and my clo'es is most worn out, and I'm cold."

But she soon dried her eyes.

"I'll jest flax 'round and tidy up," she said, talking now to Felicity, the cat, "and then I'll set down and do the mendin'. I'll take 'em to the Ladies' Aid, all ready, this afternoon. I'm thankful I don't have to find you in clo'es, Lissy—ain't you?"

Luella Eliza did not take much time to tidy up. Of the comfortable homestead which had once held a family, only two rooms and a shed kitchen were left for her use. One day, a year or two after her mother's death, she had found the old home almost dropping to pieces around her for want of repairs. There was also a mortgage, whose interest ate up her earnings. Then what seemed a great good fortune had come—she rented all her best rooms. The tenants, too, were pleased with a price cheaper than they could have found elsewhere.

But, alas, it proved to be only the beginning of sorrow. There was papering and plastering and shingling. The cistern must have an easier going pump; the chimneys must be repaired; and with painting here and patching there, it was three months before the tenants were satisfied, and many more before the bills were paid. But Luella Eliza was practising the economies of self-denial.

After the sweeping and dusting were done, the shade over the wax flowers on the mantel carefully adjusted, "Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress" and the photograph-album on the table placed

in just the right angle to the family Bible, and the bright home-made rug before the stove shaken out, Luella Eliza was ready for her labors.

Her scissors slipped and flew and her needle did marvels that morning. She was an expert seamstress, but somehow, of late, the ladies had said "her styles were not up to date." Work had fallen away, and she had been getting poorer, seemingly, and more lonely and sorrowful every day.

Yet there was a happy glow in her heart as she thought of old Mis' Andrews and the lame daughter of the washerwoman. She glanced at the larger pile. Out of these warm garments which her mother had scarcely worn, she would have abundant supplies for herself. She looked back again at the clothes she was patching. Why did that text flash into her mind?—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto Me."

"Unto Me!" Was she really preparing this clothing for the Lord—but it must be, for he had said so. Somehow the patches looked more shabby. They grew unseemingly—indecorous—shocking!

"No, I can't do it," said Luella Eliza, at last, with decision. "I can't do it. I can't dress the Lord in patches."

She took off her glasses, and rubbed them with energy, the tears swelling again beneath her eyelids. Then she sorted out her two piles again. The neatly mended garments were laid aside for herself. All the best was chosen out and wrapped in paper—and then it was time to warm up the cold beans, and eat her dinner.

It was a glowing heart which Luella Eliza took to the Ladies' Aid Society on the afternoon when she was fifty-four. She was giving the Lord her best—yes, she was sure now that it was her best.

There was a glow at her heart as she walked home in the early winter twilight. Yet sometimes she shivered, too, for the old cloak was a less protection this winter than ever, and she had a shamefaced sense that the lining was all frayed out. There had been a whole warm cloak in the package she had taken to the Aid Society. Her mother had worn it through a careful, tidy winter, but it was good as new, and, oh, so thick and warm! She had sometimes opened the chest and run her fingers lovingly over the soft plush. That was a specially sacred gift. It was to go to no less a person than the wife of a home missionary in the Northwest.

After a supper of corn cake—she had saved some milk since yesterday for Felicity—she adjusted her glasses by the little kerosene lamp, and began to inspect the old cloak.

"Mebbe I could find silk pieces enough to mend it," she said to Felicity. But an exhaustive search through all her piece bags was in vain; silk pieces there were none.

"It needs new linin' all through, and I could wad it to make it warmer, Lissy," she said, "but oh, where's the money comin' from?"

She shook out her old pocketbook. It had a few pennies—one, two, three; she rubbed her finger under the torn lining—three more—six pennies in all!

"Not enough even to buy waddin," she said.

And then Luella Eliza's heart fell, a dead weight, in her breast. She was discouraged. She took off her blurred glasses. She fell upon her knees.

"Oh, Jesus!" she sobbed; "I do try—I do try; but to be so poor, it is hard—hard!"

But who went even into that glorious presence and returned despairing?

Luella Eliza rose and wiped her eyes. "Shame on me for bein' so ungrateful!" she said. "I've got a warm room, and plenty of coverlets, and coal yet in the shed. 'I've got my health and my hands—and may the Lord help me to see his mercies!'"

That night Luella Eliza had a vision—she knew it was a vision. The dim outlines of the stove, the chair, the table, seemed to blend somehow, and float away in a sweet atmosphere of gentle twilight. Somewhere above, in the still, soft gloom, a face grew out of the darkness—and she knew him, as we shall know him in that blessed moment of his appearing. As she lay, wrapped in the perfect peace of tender awe, she heard a voice.

"Sister," it said, "thou hast clothed Me with thy best, but from henceforth I, too, shall wear these, they shall clothe Me also, for thou hast become a temple in which I may delight to dwell."

In her vision she seemed to see her Saviour lay his hand upon her humble garments; and lo, they glowed "so as no fuller on earth could white them." And then she forgot everything in dreamless sleep.

In the morning she recalled with a heart full of tender joy, the vision, and the words, "As they clothe thee, they shall clothe Me also." Surely, then, she needed not be ashamed of the frayed lining of her cloak, nor dread the bitter, piercing wind!

But the morning did not pass without new proof of his care and love. There was a knock at the door. A hearty-looking countryman stood there.

"Mornin'. Your barn for rent?"

"The barn? O, I—I never thought—"

"Well, if you want a renter, name yer price. I guess we can fix it up between us."

"Oh, I don't know how much—"

"Well, I'll pay three dollars a month for it. It's good and large, but shackly in places. I can tinker it up. Will that suit ye?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then, here's yer first month's rent. I'll put my horses right in."

Three dollars! It seemed a fortune to Luella Eliza as she turned it over. "How good the Lord is—oh, how good!" she murmured. "And to think," she said to Felicity, "that I never thought of rentin' the barn!"

On the way to the store for her cloak-lining, she met Mrs. Preston, for whom she had occasionally done sewing.

"Are you engaged for next week, Luella?" she asked. "No." "I'm glad. I wish you'd come over and stay a month with me. The children's things all need making or repairing, and so do mine; I lost so much time while I was away. Bring Felicity with you; she is such a well-bred kitty that we love to have her with us."

So in one natural way or another, her needs were supplied. No great miracles came—except the daily miracle of the little daily helps for which she was learning to look. And all this special grace seemed to flow into her life from the day in which she had refused to "clothe the Lord in patches."—*The Presbyterian.*

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You should thank God every morning when you get up that you have something to do that day which must be done, whether you like it or not. Being forced to work, and forced to do your best, will breed in you temperance and self-control, diligence and strength of will, cheerfulness and content, and a hundred virtues which the idle never know.

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