

Literature, &c.

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PROCRASTINATION.

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To-morrow, I will do it to-morrow was the curse of Lucy Clifton's life. When a child she always had it in view to make such charming little dresses—to-morrow. When girlhood came her lessons were never perfect,—only excuse me this once mamma, and I will never put off my lessons again! The pleader was lovely, and engaging, mamma was weakly indulgent; Lucy was forgiven, and the fault grew apace, until she rarely did anything to day, that could be put off till to-morrow. She was a wife, and the mother of two children, when our story commences.

With a cultivated mind, most engaging manners, and great beauty of form, and features, Lucy had already lost all influence over the mind of her husband, and was fast losing her hold on his affections. She had been married when quite young, as so many American girls unfortunately are, and with a character scarcely formed, had been thrown into situations of emergency and trial she was very unprepared to encounter. Her husband was a physician, had been but a year or two in practice, at the time of their marriage. William Clifton was a young man of fine abilities, and most excellent character; of quick temper, and impatient; he was ever generous, and ready to acknowledge his fault. When he married Lucy, he thought her as near perfection as it was possible for a woman to be: proportionate was his disappointment, at finding the evil habit of procrastination, almost inherent in her nature from long indulgence, threatening to overturn the whole fabric of domestic happiness his fancy had delighted to rear. There was no order in his household, no comfort by his fireside; and oft times when irritated to bitter anger, words escaped the husband that fell crushingly on the warm, affectionate heart of the wife. The evil habit of procrastination had 'grown with her growth' no parental hand, kind in its severity, had lopped off the excrescence, that now threatened to destroy her peace, that shadowed by its evil consequences her otherwise fair and beautiful character. In Lucy's sphere of life there was necessity for much self exertion, and active superintendance over the affairs of her household. They lived retired; economy and good management were essential to render the limited income Doctor Clifton derived from his practice fully adequate to their support—that income was steadily on the increase, and his friends deemed the day not far distant, when he would rise to eminence in his profession. Lucy's father, a man of considerable wealth, but large family, had purchased a house, furnished it, and presented it to Lucy; she was quite willing to limit her visiting circle to a few friends, as best suited with their present means. Surely William Clifton was not unreasonable, when he looked forward to a life of domestic happiness, with his young and tenderly nurtured bride. He could not know that her many bright excellent virtues of character would be dimmed, by the growth of one fault, until a shadow lay on the pathway of his daily life. If mothers could lift the dim curtain of the future, and read the destiny of their children, they would see neglected faults, piercing like sharp adders the bosoms that bore them, and reproach mingling with the agony, that she, who had moulded their young minds, had not done her work aright!

It was four years after their marriage Doctor Clifton entered the nursery hurriedly.

'Lucy my dear, will you have my things in order by twelve o'clock? I must leave home for two days, perhaps longer, if I find the patient I am called to see very ill.'

Yes, yes! I will see to them. What shall I do with the child, William, he is so very fretful? How I wish I had given him the medicine yesterday; he is very troublesome!

'If you think he needs it, give it to him at once,' said her husband abruptly 'and don't I beg Lucy forget my clothes.' He left the room, and Lucy tried to hush baby to sleep, but baby would not go, then the nurse girl who assisted her could not keep him quiet, and the mother, as she had often been before, became bewildered and at a loss what to do first.

'If you please ma'am what am I to get for dinner?' said the cook, the only

servant they kept in the kitchen, putting her head in at the door, and looking round with a half smile, on the littered room, and squalling baby.

'Directly, I shall be down directly, I must first get baby to sleep.'

'Very well ma'am,' was the reply, and going down an hour afterwards, Mrs Clifton found Betty with her feet stretched out and her arms folded one over the other, comfortably seated before an open window, intent in watching, and enjoying the movements of every passer-by.

'Betty, Betty!' said her mistress angrily, 'have you nothing to do, that you sit so idly here?'

'I waited for orders, ma'am.' Dinner was an hour back, Lucy assisted for a short time herself, and then went up to arrange Clifton's clothes. Baby was screaming terribly, and Lucy half terrified did yesterday's work, by giving him a dose of medicine. So the morning sped on. Clifton came in at the appointed time.

'Are my clothes in readiness, Lucy?'

She colored with vexation, and shame. 'The baby has been very cross; I have not indeed had time. But I will go now.' Clifton went down to his solitary dinner, and when he returned found Lucy busy with her needle, it was evident even to his unskilled eye there was much to be done.

'It is impossible to wait. Give me the things as they are; I am so accustomed to wearing my shirts without buttons, and my stockings with holes in, that I shall find it nothing new—nor more annoying than I daily endure.' He threw the things carelessly into his carpet bag, and left the room, nor did he say one kindly word in farewell, or affection. It was this giving away to violent anger, and using harsh language to his wife that had broken her spirit, almost her heart. She never even thought of reforming herself; she grieved bitterly, but hopelessly. Surely it is better when man and wife are joined together by the tie that 'no man may put asunder,' to strive seriously, and in affection to correct one another's faults. There is scarcely any defect of character, that a husband, by taking the right method may not cure; always providing his wife is not unprincipled. But he must be very patient; bear for a season; add to judicious counsel much tenderness and affection; making it clear to her mind that love for herself and solicitude for their mutual happiness are the objects in view. Hard in heart, and with little of woman's devotion unto him to whom her faith is pledged, must be the wife who could long resist. Not such an one was Lucy Clifton; but her husband in the stormy revulsion of feeling that had attended the first breaking up of his domestic happiness, had done injustice to her mind, to the sweetness of disposition that had borne all his anger without retorting in like manner. If Clifton was conscious of his own quickness of temper, approaching to violence, he did not for one moment suppose, that he was the cause of any portion of the misery brooding over his daily path. He attributed it all to the procrastination spirit of Lucy, and upon her head he laid the blame with no sparing hand. He forgot that she had numbered twenty years, and was the mother of two children: that her situation was one of exertion, and toil under the most favorable circumstances; that he was much her senior, had promised to cherish her tenderly. Yet the first harsh word that dwelt on Lucy's heart was from the lips of her husband! How tenderly in years long gone had she been nurtured! The kind arm of a father had guided and guarded her, the tender voice of a mother had lighted on her path like sunshine—and now! Oh ye, who would crush the spirit of the young and gentle, instead of leading it tenderly by a straight path in the way of wisdom—go down into the breaking heart and learn its agony: its desolation, when the fine feelings of a wasted nature go in upon the brain and consume it!

One morning Clifton entered the nursery, 'Lucy,' he said; 'my old classmate, and very dear friend Walter Eustace is in town. He came unexpectedly; his stay is short; I should like to ask him to spend the day with me. Could you manage, love, to have the time pass comfortably to my friend?' Lucy felt all the meaning conveyed in the emphasis on a word that from his lips sounded almost formidable in her ears.

'I will do what I can,' she answered sadly.

'Do not scruple Lucy to get assistance. Have every thing ready in time, and do not fail in having order, and good arrangement. There was a time

Lucy when Eustace heard much of you; I should be gratified to think he found the wife worthy of the praise the lover lavished so freely upon her. Sing for us to night—it is long since the piano was opened!—and look, and smile as you once did, in the days that are gone, but not forgotten Lucy.' His voice softened unconsciously, he had gone back to that early time, when love of Lucy absorbed every feeling of his heart. He sighed; the stern, and bitter realities of his life came with their heavy weight upon him, and there was no balm in the future, for the endurance of present evils.

He turned and left the room; Lucy's eye followed him, and as the door closed she murmured—'not forgotten! Oh, Clifton how little reason I have to believe you!' Lucy was absorbed in her own thoughts so long as to be unconscious of the flight of time. When she roused, she thought she would go down stairs and see what was to be done, but her little boy asked her some question, which she stopped to answer; half an hour elapsed before she got to the kitchen. She told Betty she meant to hire a cook for the morrow thought she had better go at once and engage one—yet, no, on second thoughts, she might come with her to the parlors and assist in arranging them; it would be quite time enough to engage the cook when they were completed. To the parlors they went, and Lucy was well satisfied with the result of their labor—but mark her comment: 'What a great while we have been detained here: well, I am sure I have meant this three weeks to clean the parlors, but never could find time. If I could but manage to attend them every day, they would never get so out of order.'

The next morning came, the cook not engaged yet. Betty was despatched in haste, but was unsuccessful—all engaged for the day. So Betty must be trusted, who sometimes did well, and at others signally failed. Lucy spent the morning in the kitchen assisting Betty and arranging every thing she could do, but matters above were in the mean time sadly neglected, her children dirty, and ill dressed, the nursery in confusion, and Lucy almost bewildered in deciding what had better be done, and what left undone. She concluded to keep the children in the nursery without changing their dress, and then hastened to arrange her own, and go down stairs, as her husband and his friend had by this time arrived. Her face was flushed, and her countenance anxious; she was conscious that Mr. Eustace noticed it, and her uncomfortable feelings increased. The dinner, the dinner—if it were only over! she thought a hundred times. It came at last, and all other mortifications were as nothing in comparison. There was not a dish really well cooked, and every thing was served up in a slovenly manner. Lucy's cheeks tingled with shame. Oh, if she had only sent in time for a cook! It was her bitterest thought even then. When the dinner was over Mr. Eustace asked for the children, expressing a strong desire to see them. Lucy colored, and in evident confusion, evaded the request. Her husband was silent, having a suspicion how matters stood.

Just then a great roar came from the hall, and the oldest boy burst into the room. 'Mother! mother! Hannah shut me up she did.' A word from his father silenced him, and Lucy took her dirty, ill dressed boy by the hand and left the room. She could not restrain her tears, but her keen sense of right prevented her punishing the child, as she was fully aware, had he been properly dressed, she would not have objected to his presence, and that he was only claiming an accorded privilege. Mr. Eustace very soon left, and as soon as the door closed on him Clifton thought: 'I never can hope to see a friend in comfort until I can afford to keep a house-keeper. Was there ever such a curse in a man's house as a procrastinating spirit?' With such feelings it may be supposed he could not meet his wife with any degree of cordiality. Lucy said, 'there was no help for it, she had done her very best.' Clifton answered her contemptuously; wearied and exhausted with the fatigues of the day, she made no reply, but rose up and retired to rest, glad to seek in sleep forgetfulness of the weary life she led. Clifton had been unusually irritated: when the morrow came, it still manifested itself in many ways that bore hard on Lucy; she did not reply to an angry word that fell from his lips, but she felt none the less deeply. Some misconduct in the child induced him to reflect with bitterness on her maternal management. She drew her hand over her eyes to keep back the tears, her

lip quivered, and her voice trembled as she uttered:

'Do not speak so harshly Clifton, if the fault is all mine, most certainly the misery is also!'

'Of what avail is it to speak otherwise?' he said sternly, 'you deserve wretchedness, and it is only the sure result of your precious system.'

'Did you ever encourage me to reform, or point out the way?' urged Lucy, gently.

'I married a woman for a companion, not a child to instruct her,' he answered bitterly.

'Ah—but I was a child! happy—so happy in that olden time, with all to love, and none to chide me. A child, even in years, when you took me for a wife—too soon a mother, shrinking from my responsibilities, and without courage to meet my trials. I found no sympathy to encourage me—no forbearance that my years were few—no advice when most I needed it—no tenderness when my heart was nearly breaking. It is the first time, Clifton, I have reproached you; but the worm will turn if it is trodden upon,' and Lucy left the room. It was strange, even to herself, that she had spoken so freely, yet it seemed a sort of relief to the anguish of her heart. That he had allowed her to depart without reply did not surprise her; it may be doubted, although her heart pined for it, if ever she expected tenderness from Clifton more. It was perhaps an hour after her conversation with Clifton, Lucy sat alone in the nursery; her baby was asleep in the cradle beside her; they were alone together, and as she gazed on its happy face, she hoped with a humble hope, to rear it up, that it might be enabled to give and receive happiness. There was a slight rap at the door; she opened it, and a glad cry escaped her,—'Uncle Joshua!' she exclaimed. He took her in his arms for a moment,—that kindly and excellent old man, while a tear dimmed his eye as he witnessed her joy at seeing him. She drew a stool towards him, and sat down at his feet as she had often done before in her happy, girlish days; she was glad when his hand rested her head, even as it had done in another time; she felt a friend had come back to her, who had her interest nearly at heart, who had loved her long and most tenderly. Mr. Tremaine was the brother of Lucy's mother—he had arrived in town unexpectedly; indeed had come chiefly with a view of discovering the cause of Lucy's low spirited letters—he feared all was not right, and as she was the object of almost his sole earthly attachment, he could not rest in peace while he believed her unhappy. He was fast approaching three score years and ten; never was there a warmer heart, a more incorruptible, or sterling nature. Eccentric in many things, possessing some prejudices, which inclined to ridicule in himself, no man had sounder common sense, or a more careful judgment. His hair was white, and fell in long smooth locks over his shoulders; his eye-brows were heavy, and shaded an eye as keen and penetrating as though years had no power to dim its light. The high, open brow, and the quiet tenderness that dwelt in his smile, were the crowning charms of a countenance on which nature had stamped her seal and her 'noblest work.' He spoke to Lucy of other days, of the happy home from whence he came, till her tears came down like 'summer rain,' with the mingling of sweet and bitter recollections. Of her children next, and her eye lighted, and her color came bright and joyous—the warm feelings of a mother's heart responded to every word praise he uttered. Of her husband—and sadly 'Uncle Joshua' noticed the change,—her voice was low and desponding, and a look of sorrow and care came back to the youthful face: 'Clifton was succeeding in business; she was gratified and proud of his success,' and that was all she said.

'Uncle Joshua's visit was of some duration. He saw things as they really were, and the truth pained him deeply. 'Lucy,' he said quietly, 'as one day they were alone together—I have much to say, and you to hear. Can you bear the truth, my dear girl?' She was by his side in a moment.

'Anything from you, uncle. Tell me freely all you think, and if it be in censure of poor Lucy, little doubt but that she will profit by it.'

'You are a good girl!' said Uncle Joshua, resting his hand on her head, 'and you will be rewarded yet.' He paused for a moment ere he said—'Lucy, you are not a happy wife. You married with bright prospects—who is to blame?'

'I am—but not alone,' said Lucy, in a