

Literature, &c.

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TABLEAUX.

OR PRECEPT AND PRACTICE.

BY MRS. CAROLINE H. BUTLER.

CHARITY.

A WINTER'S SUN is stealing through the windows of stained glass, and playing amid the folds of the rich crimson curtains of a luxurious drawing-room—thence flitting down upon the soft Turkeys-carpet, it dances hither and thither, now glinting across mirrors, now flashing upon some crystal vase, or scattering rainbows among the pendants of the superb chandeliers. The lofty ceilings are richly painted in fresco—the walls fluted with gold and purple, and on every side, and over every object, luxury rests its pampered finger.

Upon a sofa covered with crimson velvet sits a lady elaborately dressed—at her feet a brioche serves as a pillow for a tiny lap-dog—drawn up before her is a small marble table bearing a beautiful little esortoir. The lady is writing. She dips her costly pen into the chased silver standish.

'Yes, my dear sir,' she writes, 'the sentiments you have expressed are indeed honorable to human nature—the world did not contain more whose feelings of philanthropy might accord with yours! Charity is indeed a heavenly virtue! O when I think of the houseless, shivering wretches who daily crawl around the doors of the rich man—with hardly strength to bag for the offals which them denied are given to the dogs, my heart swells with indignation and pity! What greater pleasure can there be than to relieve the sufferings of these miserable beings! how delightful to dry the tear of the helpless widow, and fill the mouths of the famished brood for whose wants those tears are shed! Ah, my dear sir, I—'

'My dear Mrs. Tripabout, good morning—I am delighted to see you—but do tell me my dear, did your husband succeed in procuring those tickets for the Opera?'

'O I fear not,' replies Mrs. Tripabout, 'never was any thing more provoking! He had just money to pay for them, when, as the fates would have it, in came old Cobblewell, the shoemaker, with his long bill—old story—sick wife—lame child—and rheumatism; and so my foolish husband, instead of putting him off 'till to-morrow,' must needs pay the bill! And now I expect by the time he can go to his office and back again, the tickets will be all sold—there is such a rush.'

'It is indeed provoking,' answers Mrs. Easy, 'for I assure you I had quite set my heart upon going. But what have you been doing to-day for the good cause?'

'Why I have just been to see Mrs. Firmer, that mean woman—and she really refused to put down more than two dollars for our 'Poverty Stricken, Charitable Relief Society,' and Miss Maria had even the assurance to tell me she doubted if any good would result from our undertaking.'

'Indeed! so should I, if she had any thing to do with it,' answers Mrs. Easy.

'Well, after I left Mrs. Firmer,' continued Mrs. Tripabout, 'I called to see old Madam Nelson, and although I coaxed and flattered the old soul for half an hour, not a cent would she give me. She told me very candidly, to be sure, that she had a large family of orphan grandchildren to support, and I know her circumstances are not good—but what are ten dollars! He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord! How much shall you put down?'

'Me! it is enough to have the trouble of the thing I think, without giving!' answers Mrs. Easy. 'Why, I pay seventy-five dollars a quarter for Delphine's music, and then there are her Polka lessons—and Artemesia has set her heart upon going to Washington this winter, and I must have a new velvet cloak! so you see the thing is impossible. I can't afford it—can you?'

'The idea of such a thing! no indeed—look at me—did you ever see such a figure? Why I'm positively shabby!' says Mrs. Tripabout.

'Would you believe it was only two months ago that I paid one hundred dollars for this shawl, and now look at it; and my feather—ha, ha, ha! did you ever? No, indeed, I think if I am willing to ruin my clothes in the service of the Poverty Stricken, Charitable Relief Society, it's all I can do! But good bye, I must take my subscription book down among the merchants; O I like to get into one of their fine stores; I can talk—I can preach; well, well, good bye!'

'Ha! ha! good bye, you droll creature!' cries Mrs. Easy. (Rings her bell.) 'Here, John, bring me a glass of wine and a cream cake; and, John, tell Nicholas to look at the furnace, for I really think the rooms are getting cold. It is a most bitter day, John; think of the poor, and how thankful you ought to be that you have so good a place.'

'Lord bless you, ma'am, I is!' answers John, 'and I wanted to ask you, ma'am, if so I might give old Betty the slop woman a bucket of coal; the poor old creature, ma'am, looks so blue and shivering.'

'A-hem! coal, John? Why, one bucket of coal would only be an aggravation to the poor soul! I will remember her case; yes, I will speak to the Poverty Stricken, Charitable Relief Society. Take care of yourself, John, and remember the poor in your prayers.'

'Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Easy sails across the room to her mirror—she adjusts a ringlet—clasps her brooch anew over the transparent Meclin—She then slightly draws aside the heavy curtains, and her delicate frame shivers as she looks forth upon the cold, snowy street. A poor woman upon the opposite flagging is striving to hush the feeble wail of the infant in her arms, while another half-naked little thing is toddling by her side.

'It is strange,' ejaculates Mrs. Easy, 'that persons of that class cannot find employment—very—there can be no need of their parading the streets in this manner—none!'

At this moment a miserable mendicant stops under the window—he sees the richly clad lady—he holds up his tattered hat, and his piercing tones of grief and misery penetrate even through the thick panes of plate glass:

'For the love of God, a little money, ma-dam, to buy bread for my famishing children!'

But the fine lady quickly lets fall the hangings from her bejeweled hand, and once more seats herself upon the luxurious sofa. Again she takes the pen—

'Let me see, where was I—em—em—widow—em—tears famished—em—Ah, my kind sir, I (writes) cannot be sufficiently thankful that Providence has placed me in a situation of usefulness! that I have it in my power to alleviate the miseries of—'

(Enter John with cake and wine.)

'Very well—you need not wait, John.'

'No ma'am—but there's a poor woman down stairs, ma'am,—and she wants a little help—she wants to know, ma'am if the mistress would give her just an old dress, or a pair of shoes, or—'

'John, I am very busy—don't you see I am writing! Never intrude upon me with such matters.'

'I ask pardon, ma'am, but she looked so pitiful like, and begged so hard for the cook just to give her a cold potato that I—'

Well, give her a cold potato, John, if she looks deserving—and here John, is a shill—no, a sixpence for her—and, John take this quarter and buy something nice for poor little Muffin, patting her dog, 'he is so dainty—little pet!'

And taking up her lap dog, as John retreats, she kisses it—feeds it with cream cake—sips her wine, and finally, her head reclining languidly upon the soft yielding cushions of the sofa, the President of the 'Poverty Stricken, Charitable Relief Society' falls asleep!

TEMPERANCE.

'How happens it that your account is over-drawn sir?' quoth old Mr Wiggins to a pale, cadaverous young man writing at the opposite desk.

'How happens it that with your salary you have taken two months in advance?'

'Sir,' replies the young man, 'I was forced to overdraw on account of sickness in my family. I regret to have been obliged to do so—but my expenses the past year were very heavy. My poor wife—'

'Eh! married are you?' interrupts Mr Wiggins.

'Yes sir I have a wife and child. My wife has been sick a long while—she is still very feeble, but the physician encourages me with the hope that, by tender nursing and great care, she may yet recover. He orders old wine, and other delicacies, which, of course, are expensive; and thus, sir, I have been forced from circumstances to do as I have done.'

'I believe so, sir—I believe so,' replies Mr Wiggins, 'and no good will come of it either, let me tell you! Old wine, indeed, and I'll warrant you woodcock! nonsense a plain diet sir, is the thing. Gruels, arrow-root, cream soup—old wine will be very injurious to her, very—all stimulants are. Let me tell you, sir, if your wife lives upon wine and wood-cocks she'll die—that's all—she'll die! Sick-ness engenders a morbid appetite, appetite engenders excess, excess engenders apoplexy, and apoplexy puts you in a coffin—she'll die—that's all, sir!'

'Mr Wiggins, it was my intention to demand an increase salary—for I—'

'An increase of salary!' interrupts Mr Wiggins. 'An increase of salary! Sir, I give you now three hundred dollars—yes, hear that, three hundred dollars a year—it is enough! You wish to buy old wine, do you, and other deleterious matters—no, sir—I should be committing sin to put it in your power. Temperance, sir, in eating and drinking can alone preserve health and long life! Look at me. What should I have been—what should I be if I fed upon wine and woodcocks? No sir, your salary cannot be increased—hem!'

And Mr Wiggins takes up a pen and writes: 'Mr. B.—Sir, send to my house before five o'clock, one basket champagne, and one dozen best old wine.'

'Here, Bill, take this down to Mr B.; and here, stop Bill, buy a box of prime Spanish cigars and carry them to the house.'

'Yes, sir.'

A gentleman enters with a flushed face, and the air of a bon-vivant.

'Good morning, my dear Wiggins.'

'Good morning Wiggins. I am sick,' emphatically.

'Sorry to hear it,' replies Mr. Wiggins. 'You do look a little feverish. Ah, my dear fellow, I am afraid you live too well, I fear you are not sufficiently abstemious in your diet. Luxury in eating, I am sorry to say, is a fast growing evil in our country. Look at our forefathers, what iron frames, what muscle, all bone and sinew, then look at the pigmy race of the present day, Lilliputians in comparison! We must go back to the primitive habits of our ancestors, or the doctors and the undertakers will be the only flourishing trades.'

'I do not call myself a bon-vant by any means,' replies Wiggins, 'I take my half dozen glasses of wine or so, with my dinner; but I'm moderate; very moderate!'

'No, you are not moderate!' answers Mr Wiggins, 'slapping his hand upon the table, 'we must all turn Grahamites' sir, if we would prolong life and health; and what is life without health—health is a great blessing. Yes, sir, we must all follow the precepts of that benefactor of the human race—live on brown bread, drink cold water, nor even inhale the odor of roast beef, which insensibly impregnates the blood.'

Five o'clock P. M. An Elegant house in B—street. Mr Wiggins has a night key—he enters the spacious hall.

'Fmf!—fmf!—fmf!—that beef smells overdone—that rascally cooking.'

(Ascends the dining-room, Rings the bell.)

'Ben, is dinner ready?'

'Yes sir. All ready, sir.' But Mrs. Wiggins is out.

'Out is she!' quoth Wiggins, 'fmf!—fmf!—hem!—hem! three minutes, fourteen seconds past five fmf!—no dinner was ever fit to eat five minutes after it was cooked? Tell the cook to dish up—dish up, I say, quick.' (Ben disappears.) 'Ah! here is the wine—come, Mr. B., let's taste your quality.' (Drinks—smacks his lips.) 'Very good, very good; indeed; right flavour—I'll try another glass.'

(Dinner is brought in—Mr Wiggins seats himself at table.)

'Sorry to set down without Mrs. Wiggins, but here, Ben, the turtle soup—but things must be eaten in time—very good—another spoonful Ben—yes, very good—but tell the cook, Ben, the next time to add more spice, and a little more wine—do you hear?'

'Yes, sir.'

(Enter Mrs. Wiggins.)

'Ah! my dear—sorry to sit down alone—the wine, Ben—dinner spoiling—pleasure of wine with you, Mrs. Wiggins. Capital beef, my love—told the butcher always to send the best; very best, fat, juicy; here, Ben, take my plate; moderation—temperance—is my maxim. Poor Wiggins! suffering from indigestion—too free—too free. Ah! yes, my dear, a slice of that pudding—most excellent—a custard, if you please—more wine, Ben; your health, Mrs. Wiggins!'

A note is handed Mr. Wiggins—he breaks the seal and reads:

'Mr. Zebedee Wiggins—Dear Sir, you are respectfully invited by the members of the 'Temperance Eating and Drinking Society,' to deliver an Address upon the importance of our theory, suggested by the sudden demise of a POOR PAUPER, who instantly fell dead from simply inhaling the effluvia of an EMPTY WINE CASK!'

DRINKER WATERS, Secretary.

JUSTICE.

Look at that fine bakery, see, the large bow windows are filled with tempting loaves of white bread! There are rolls, too; and nice butter-crackers, ginger-bread cakes, cookies, and buns how fine! And, standing at the door, a large willow basket filled with tempting loaves, smoking hot! Ah, the baker, must carry on a brisk trade, for see, there are one, two, three house-maids just gone in with their neat napkins, to purchase for their employers' tea table! Hear the sixpences and shillings rattle down! How they shine as the gook baker sweeps them from the counter into his money drawer! There goes another, and another! Really, Mr. Baker, you have a right to wear that pleasant smile.

But do you see yonder pale, haggard little wretch at the corner? Look at his sunken eyes—his wasted frame! See those long bony fingers! He has scarcely clothes to cover him—he is without hat or shoes. See how his famished eye gleams upon the baker's window, and now upon the basket at the shop-door. He seems almost a mind to go in; he places one thin foot upon the broad stone step.

Off with you this moment!

'Please, sir—'

'Off, I tell you—don't be hanging round here!'

And the boy retreats. But yonder he comes again! He is by the bow-window once more! He looks even paler than he did just now! He casts his eye up and down the street; he looks behind, and on each side of him. How he trembles! Again his eye rests upon the bread; his teeth chatter; his hand shakes! What is he about to do? Again his eye wanders quickly around; ah, yes, he has taken a loaf from the basket! He is off; he runs!

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' is the cry! They are after him; see how the multitude gather; the shopman leaves his counter; the shoemaker his bench; boys run, dogs bark, and men, too, stout, healthy men, pursue the track of the feeble child!

He flies—despair gives him speed; one can almost hear his panting breath; his heart beats; he reaches a miserable cellar; he tumbles down the worm-eaten steps; he rushes in!

'Oh, mother, mother! Save me, save me! Mother they are after me! I have stolen a—oh, mother!'

And the loaf drops upon the floor—for hark! the shout; they are there; yes, the door is burst open; the boy is surrounded! But do you see through the net of the crowd that little starving child crawling from yonder dark corner over the slippery floor, to pick up the bread now trampled under foot, unconscious of all save to appease its hunger!

'O, you little thief!'

'You scape-gallows!'

'Shame on you—so young a boy!' echoes from the crowd.

'O, let him go, let the child go!' screams a miserable, squalid woman, whose dark locks hang matted and tangled over her sallow face.

'Let him go, and the Lord 'll bless yez!'

'Let him go? No, no, indeed! Come along, you little thief!'

'Och! it's starving we we were; and him there sick, and not able to move; and my children all with the fever! Oh, it was for them he took the bread! Oh, mercy, mercy; have pity upon him!'

'Oh ho! woman; we'll have you up, too, if you don't take care! You justify him, do you? A pretty swarm you are! Come along, you little scamp, to the police!'

And, trembling in every limb, his pale, frightened face still turned in agony upon his wretched mother, the boy is borne off by a stout constable, followed by the gaping, idle crowd.

In an obscure part of the city, in a modest two-story house, dwells Mr. Smith, an honest and industrious citizen. He is a merchant. In the disastrous times of '36-'7, he shared the fate of many others—he was bankrupt. As an upright man he strove to do his creditors justice—begarding himself he paid them all. With a large family upon his hands, for a long time he struggled on in poverty. At length, he was once more enabled to go into business; he is now building himself up with credit and honor. His affairs are prosperous. He now looks forward—not to wealth—for he has lived long enough to know that riches and happiness are not always linked hand in hand—but to a competence sufficient to enable him to bring forward his children reputably in life, and to smooth the path of his declining years.

Yonder princely mansion is the residence of Mr. Deville. He also is a merchant. It is evening. Soft music floats on the ear—light forms may be seen gliding past the windows in the graceful waltz; and the passer-by, as he treads the broad stone flagging beneath, may inhale the odor of beautiful bouquets clasped in the hand of beauty, and of rare and costly perfumes. The sumptuous drawing-rooms, replete with every elegance, are thronged with fashion—the mistress of the gay set, and her accomplished daughters, and brilliant with jewels, and rustle in silk and brocade. The supper tables are loaded with every luxury, and who so polite, who so engaging, as the courtly master of the mansion.

Deville meets Smith in the street.

'Ah, my dear friend, most happy to see you. I was just going to your counting-room. The fact is, I have a large amount of money to pay to-day. My dear fellow, can you oblige me with a loan of ten thousand dollars for a day or two?'

'Ten thousand dollars!' answers Smith: 'let me see: em, when can you pay me, Deville?'

'On Monday, you may rely upon having the amount returned,' replies Deville.

'You are certain?'

'Honor bright, my dear fellow!'

'For on that day,' continues Smith, 'I have several heavy notes to pay.'

'Pooh! pooh! You may be sure of it!' answers Deville; 'and if you are short, why I can then let you have as much money as you may want!'

'Thank you, thank you!' exclaims Smith. 'Step with me to my counting room, and I will draw you a check.'

Monday arrives.

Mr. Smith enters the counting-room of Deville.

'Well, Deville, the check if you please.'

'Pon my soul, my dear fellow,' says Deville, 'balancing his legs upon a chair, and thrusting his thumbs through the arm-holes of his vest, 'pon my soul, I cannot possibly pay you to-day! I am extremely sorry!'

'Can't pay me!' cries Smith, thunderstruck: 'can't pay me! You must borrow it for me, then, and that, too, immediately. I must have the money; my credit is at stake!'

'I should be excessively happy to oblige you my dear friend,' answers Deville, 'but you see, I have been obliged to borrow so much on my own account lately, that really I—the—the appearance of the thing would—'

'But, good God!' interrupts the agitated man; 'what am I to do?—what is to become of my notes? My notes, man! Trusting in your promptitude, I have given myself no anxiety. The banks will close in half an hour. Sir, what am I to do?'

'Can't say, 'pon my honor,' replies Deville, coolly, picking his teeth: 'very hard case; an unpleasant dilemma, certainly; I really don't know what you can do; I—oh—are you going? I say, Smith, my dear fellow, came and dine with me to-morrow.'

The court-room is crowded.

'Bring in the prisoner!'

And the child who robbed the baker of a loaf, is placed at the bar; frightened at the stern looks of the judge, and at the multitude of faces all bent so darkly upon him; his limbs tremble, and he can hardly support his own shivelled frame.

'Who saw this boy take the loaf?'

'I did, please your honor,' quoth a red-faced, portly woman, bustling forward. 'I did. I was just taking home a shoulder of mutton from the butcher at the corner, your honor, and I saw the boy hanging round the shop, and I knew the moment I looked upon him, so pale and haggard as he is, that he was a thief; and so, thinks I, I'll watch you, my lad; and sure enough, your honor, I saw him just reach out his hand—so—and snatch a loaf, and then I called out 'stop thief!'

'Oh, woman, woman!' cried a shrill voice from the crowd, 'did ye do it! and had you the heart to cry thief upon the child, when ye see the miserable look of it! Ah, your honor, hear