

## A LESSON IN PATIENCE

I was very unhappy, from a variety of causes, definable and undefinable. My chambermaid had been cross for a week, and, by talking to my cook, had made her dissatisfied with her place.

The mother of five little children, I felt that I had a weight of care and responsibility greater than I could support. I was unequal to the task. My spirits fell under its bare contemplation. Then I had been disappointed in a seamstress, and my children were, as the saying is, 'in rags.' While brooding over these and other disheartening circumstances, Netty, my chambermaid, opened the door of the room where I was sitting (it was Monday morning), and said:

'Harriet has just sent word that she is sick, and can't come to-day.'

'Then you and Agnes will have to do the washing.' I replied, in fretful voice: this new source of trouble completely breaking me down.

'Indeed, ma'am,' replied Netty, tossing her head and speaking with some pertness, 'I can't do the washing. I didn't engage for anything but chamberwork.'

When my husband came home at dinner time, things did not seem very pleasant for him. I must own, I had on a long, a very long face, much longer than it was when he went away in the morning.

'What is the great trouble now, Jane?' said my husband, without being at all fretted with my unamiable temper. 'Let us hear. Perhaps I can suggest a remedy.'

'If you will get me a washer-woman, you will exceedingly oblige me,' said I.

'Where is Harriet?' he asked.

'She is sick, or pretends to be, I don't know which.'

'Perhaps she will be well enough to do your washing to-morrow,' suggested my husband.

'Perhaps is a poor dependence.'

'Can't you get some one else to do your washing this week?'

I made no reply. The question was easily asked. After that my husband was silent in that peculiar way that I understood, too well, as the effect of my words, or tones, or state of mind. Here was another cause for unhappiness, in the reflection that I had disturbed my husband's peace.

After my husband went away on finishing his dinner, I went to bed, and cried for more than half the afternoon. Oh! how wretched I felt! Life seemed an almost intolerable burden.

Then my mind seemed more composed, and I tried to think about what was to be done. The necessity for having clothes washed was absolute; and this roused me, at length, as the most pressing domestic duty, into thinking so earnestly, that I presently rang the bell for Netty, who came in her own good time.

'Tell Agnes that I want to see her,' said I, not in a very good natured way.

The effect was that Netty left the chamber without replying, and slammed the door hard after her, which mark of disrespect set my blood to boiling. In a little while my cook made her appearance.

'Agnes,' said I, 'do you know of any one that I can engage to do the washing this week?'

'There's a poor woman who lives near my mother's. I think she goes out to wash sometimes.'

'I wish you would step round and see if she can't come here to-morrow.'

Agnes said that she would do so.

'Tell her she must come,' said I.

Agnes withdrew. In an hour she came back, and said that she had seen the woman, who promised to come.

The name of this woman was Mrs. Partridge. It was some relief to think I was going to get my washing done; but the idea of having the ironing about all the week fretted my mind. And no sooner was this leading trouble set aside, than I began to worry about the children's clothes, and the prospect of losing my cook, who had managed my kitchen more to my satisfaction than any one had ever done before.

In the morning Mrs. Partridge came early and commenced the washing. There was something in this woman's appearance that interested me, and something in her face that reminded me of somebody I had seen before; but when and where I could not tell. Although her clothes were poor and faded, there was nothing common about her, and she struck me as being superior to her class. Several times during the morning I had to go into the kitchen where she was at work, and each time her appearance impressed me more and more. An emotion of pity arose in my bosom, as I saw her bending over the washing tub, and remembered that, for this hard labor during the whole day she was to get but 75 cents. While in her presence I felt rebuked for my complaining spirit.

At dinner Mrs. Partridge came to my room, and with a gentle, patient smile on her face, said:

'If you have no objections, ma'am, I would like to run home for a few minutes to nurse my baby and give the children something to eat. I'll make up the time.'

'Go by all means,' I replied, with an effort to speak calmly.

The woman turned and went quickly away.

'Run home to nurse the baby and give the children something to eat!' The words went through and through me. So unexpected a request, revealing, as it did, the existence of such biting poverty in one who was evidently bearing her hard lot without a murmur, made me feel ashamed of myself for complaining at things which I ought to have borne with a cheerful spirit. I had a comfortable, in fact a luxurious, home, a kind and provident husband, and servants to do everything in my house.

'It is wicked in me to feel as I do,' I could not help saying, as I made an effort to turn away from the picture that was before me.

When Mrs. Partridge came back, which was in about half an hour, I said to her:

'Did you find all safe at home?'

'Yes, ma'am, thank you,' she answered cheerfully.

'How old is your baby?'

'Eleven months old, ma'am.'

'Is your husband living?'

'No, ma'am; he died more than a year ago.'

'How many children have you?'

'Four.'

'All young?'

'Yes, ma'am. The oldest is only in her tenth year, but she is a good little girl, and takes care of the baby for me almost as well as a grown person. I don't know what I would do without her.'

'But are you not afraid to leave them all at home alone, for so long a time?'

'No, ma'am. Jane takes excellent care of them, and she is so kind that they will obey her as well as they do me. I am certainly blessed in having so good a child.'

'And only in her tenth year!' said I—the image of my Alice coming before my mind, with the thought of the little use she would be as a nurse and caretaker of her younger brothers and sisters.

But how in the world, Mrs. Partridge, said I, 'do you manage to provide for four children, and do for them at the same time?'

'I find it hard work,' she replied; 'and sometimes I feel discouraged for a little while; but by patience and perseverance I manage to get along.'

Mrs. Partridge went to her washing, and I sat down in my comfortable room, having a servant in every department of my family, and ample means for the supply of every comfort and luxury I could reasonably desire.

'If she can get along by patience and perseverance,' said I to myself, 'it's a shame for me that I can't.' It was not long before Netty came into my room, saying, as she did so—

'Mrs. Smith, what frock shall I put on Alice?'

'The one with a blue sprig,' I replied.

'That's in the wash,' was answered.

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