

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

CRIS-CROSS.

Miss Lydia Crane was an old maid, there could be no mistake about that; not in virtue of her age merely, for she was only thirty-five when Mr. Sylver came to Lyndon to preach, and many a woman has become wife and mother after that age; but Miss Lydia was a born old maid. Her parents died during her early childhood, and she passed into the care of three maiden ladies, daughters of old Parson Beach, whose place Mr. Sylver afterward filled in Lyndon church; and the three trained her in true spinster fashion, her inexpressive nature falling readily into their ways.

She had a little money of her own, and a small house with a garden and orchard pertaining to it; and as all three of her guardians died before she came of age, when that period arrived she gave notice to her tenant that she wanted that house herself. And then what a reign of expurgation began within the four walls! All that soap, sand, chloride of lime, hot water, paint and whitewash could do, was done there, by the aid of strong arms and stronger will. The house was much like every other house in Lyndon; white, oblong, bedecked with green blinds, and having a kitchen at the back; but no other house was ever so speckless, so sweet of scent, so fearfully clean.

It was kept dark to be sure; no sunshine allowed on the premises; and it was bare of ornament, for pictures and brackets and vases gathered dust; but it was clean, and Miss Lydia devoted her daily energies to keeping it in this condition.

She had money enough to live on, but her nature was frugal and industrious; so she took in fine sewing, and made shrouds and coffin trimmings for the Lyndon manufactory, till her bank account grew visibly from year to year, and she was more and more respected as a person of "means."

She had but one relative, a half-brother living in Ohio, who had been sent to his mother's relatives when their father died, and was scarcely a memory to her personally; yet they kept up a feeble correspondence, and she cherished a shocking quartet of daguerreotypes in her drawer as representatives, in the oldest style of the art, of Joseph and his wife, and their two children, John and Mariette.

With assured comforts, luxuries if she needed them, and no real trouble, Miss Lydia ought to have been a happy woman; even her heart, such as it was, had so long been idle that its capacities for joy or grief seemed dulled forever, and spared her the aching and throbbing that so disturbs the peace of her sex generally; but the very absence of genuine causes of suffering made her take for grievance all the lesser ills of life. There is a curious tendency in human nature to crave sorrow in a hidden and unconscious way, that does not need or find words, but betrays itself in actions. It is like the physical longing for salt; pure joy and peace are savourless without this pungent flavour of tears; there is no relief to sculpture without shadow, no delight to the eye like dawn, and yet dawn implies darkness, inevitably.

So Miss Lydia found her own troubles, and used them well; petted, cherished and made the most of them. Her neighbours had hens, and the first and strongest tendency of hens, as we all know, is communistic; they want to and will share all the property about them; their cackling souls knew no reason why Miss Lydia's garden was not for them to scratch up as well as the rest of creation's attainable face. But this "bloated property-holder" objected, and after years of skirmishes, routs, reiterated charges and fresh repulses, screams of battle and clamours of victory, she defended her rights by a seven-foot paling all about the garden; which cost twice as much as all the hens had destroyed since their earliest trespass, but effectually discomfited them, and added another to the long list of the triumphs of capital over labour.

Then there were boys in Lyndon, as usual; boys are an obstinate fact everywhere; we thank kind Providence that the Indians are exterminated in these regions, and plume ourselves on the fact that the last of the Mohicans pointed a moral and adorned a tale long ago; but do we ever reflect on the host and hordes of boys that are still left? I think Miss Lydia would have preferred the Indians.

However, boys seem to be a necessity in the scheme of man, "mighty mace" as it is, and it seems to be an equal necessity to boys to steal apples. Miss Lydia's orchard was tempting as the Hesperides. Early summer apples bedecked it with great crimson spheres and balls of gold, juicy and fragrant enough to have beguiled a demon; and when the winter crop bent those gracious boughs with all sorts of fruity splendours, blushing Peck's Pheasants, rick dark gillflowers, the stippled Northern Spy, red as rubies, and enormous yellow pippins, glowing beside Roxbury russets, the Quakers of the tribe, and honest Newtown pippins, better far than their exterior promise; how could any boys resist them? Yet to see one urchin pick up an apple through the bars was agony to Miss Lydia; she would have given them pecks for the asking, she was not stingy,—but she knew her rights and wanted them respected. But what fun is there in asking anybody to give you an apple when you can just pick it up? It was almost an adventure to steal "old Lyd's" apples in the face of her watchful eyes and alert ears; the fence went for nothing, boys will

"—find out the way"

to wait, over more obstacles than Love in the old ballad; so here was a good, steady affliction, coming every other year as surely as the apple crop. Then there were the flies. But flies are an exhaustive subject, not for the brief limits of this article; I can only say in passing that if Miss Lydia had pursued Satan with half the energy, truculence, and untiring persistence with which she hunted flies, he would have fled from her atmosphere and left her to peace and sanctity very early in life.

Besides these special and recurrent grievances, there were the daily "happenings," as we call them, of all human experience; times when the soap would not "come," do what you would; when the chimney smoked, the spout leaked, and crockery slipped from her fingers without rhyme or rea-

son: when pork grew rusty in the larder in defiance of precedent, moths got into the carpets, and mice into the garret;—in short, days when everything, to use her favourite expression, went "cris-cross."

Now Lydia Crane was not naturally inclined to be querulous or selfish; she had been duly converted in the progress of a revival in Lyndon, and joined the church during Parson Beach's life-time. She read her Bible daily; said her prayers I use the phrase advisedly—and was a punctual attendant on all the means of grace. She was the head and front of the church sewing-society, and secretary of the Foreign Mission Circle, yet in the living of her life she had become, at the age of thirty-five, fretful, self-centred, opinionated, and domineering; but perfectly certain she was an exemplary Christian. Charity, sympathy, tenderness, do not grow in such solitude as hers; it is not good for man or woman to be alone; and if to be a Christian is to wear the image of Christ, as the gospel seems to imply, there was very little obvious likeness in Miss Lydia to the Master whose name she wore.

Yet she was a thoroughly honest woman, anxious above all things to do right; ready to give to every "object" that impelled the long-handled contribution boxes, with deacons at the other end, through every slip on every other Sunday, though she had not even a kind word for the beggar at her door; for begging implied "shiftlessness" and that was unpardonable.

But just before Mr. Sylver was settled in Lyndon Miss Lydia received a letter from her niece that amazed and disgusted her. It ran thus wise:

"Dear aunt  
"If you see me some of these days walk in at your door don't you be surprised. If pa don't stop I shall run away. I certainly shall, and I haven't got anywhere else to go. You see I want to marry Alf. Peck, just the nicest fellow you ever saw. I don't care if he is poor, he's awfully smart; but pa has got a kind of a prejudice against him; he won't let me see him, if he can help it; but you better believe he can't lock me up if he tries! So anyway, if he gets too mighty I'm going to run for it, and I know you are real good, everybody says so. Just write a line to say you've got this and direct it to Alf. Peck for me. Don't for anything let pa know, but I don't believe you will. Goodbye.

"Your affectionate niece,

"MARIETTE."

The impudence of the thing took away Miss Lydia's breath. She gave shelter to a runaway girl! the idea was monstrous. She had a great mind to inclose the letter directly to her brother; but the bell rang for preparatory lecture just then, so she tied on her bonnet and went to church, and after she had slept that night on the matter, she resolved to delay any action at present. A dim sort of sympathy made her unwilling to betray Mariette to her father; an *esprit du corps*, that she would not have acknowledged to herself, for Lydia never had a real lover; two or three elderly widowers had made prudent advances to her in vain; but no tender sentiment had ever stirred her chilly heart. Yet after all she was a woman, and shrank from violating this girl's confidence, however she disapproved of it. Several weeks passed and her fears vanished; she took no notice of the letter, determined neither to "make nor meddle" in the matter. In the meantime Mr. Sylver had been ordained to the church, moved his family into the parsonage, and commenced a round of pastoral visits. It was one of the loveliest of all June afternoons that he stood at Miss Lydia's door knocking for admittance. The white roses that clambered up to the chamber windows were thick set with bloom in every stage of beauty, from the swelling bud folded in green wrappings to the full-blown trembling blossom in whose glowing heart a dew drop quivered; sure token that the night wind had parted their pure leaves and dropped a tear of foreboding over their certain fading. Beds of pinks scented the fresh air with spice, and the early cinnamon roses were dull with half-finished and half-dead flowers, sending a sickly oriental odour of attar across the perfume and honey that freighted every breeze.

Miss Lydia herself came to the door; her usually calm and rigid face was flushed with some trouble evidently, and in her hand she held the yellow cover of a telegram; but she was glad to see Mr. Sylver; he was the minister and the new minister; it was a duty to be glad to see him. As he seated himself in the prim, cold parlour, he opened the conversation with a remark on the weather, that sure and safe first step.

"Yes, it's good weather," allowed Miss Lydia. "We generally do have the best of weather in June. I wish sometimes it would last right along through the year."

"Perhaps we should not enjoy it as much if we had it all the time," quietly answered the minister.

"Mebbe not; but I can't say I like cold weather; it makes such a sight of dirty work. Wood is trying enough; always droppin' everywhere specks and shivers; but coal—coal is a heap worse."

Mr. Sylver smiled. "But June is dusty."

"Yes; there's trouble every where. Seems sometimes as though you couldn't pass a day without it."

"Yet one would think, Miss Crane, that you had very little, you have a lovely home here, and no family cares or sorrows."

"Well everybody has their own troubles,"—her mind reverted here to the list we have already chronicled, and she felt rather unwilling to confide them to the minister, so she wound up with a glittering generality. "I have mine as well as other folks; there's a good many days when everything under the canopy seems to go cris-cross with me."

"Then you ought to be blessed indeed," gravely answered Mr. Sylver.

Miss Lydia stared, but he went on. "I mean if you fully enter into the meaning of that word; it is only a contraction of 'Christ's cross.' Surely if you bear His cross daily, you are an unusually privileged woman."

"I don't know what you mean," she answered, with rude honesty.

"You are a Christian, Miss Lydia?"

"Well I should hope so! I've been a professor near about twenty years."

"But I mean a Christian," insisted Mr. Sylver.

Miss Lydia darted a keen glance at him, but it sank before the clear, cool, penetrating look of his gray eyes. She moved uneasily on her chair.

"Why, I suppose I am. I mean to be."

"Then if things go with you according to Christ's cross every day, it is well with you, certainly."

"I didn't know as anybody liked crosses."

"No; but there is a wide difference between the cross we carry for ourselves and that we bear for Christ; there was Simon of Cyrene, you know; 'him they compelled to bear the cross.' It was harder for him, no doubt, than it would have been for John, who loved the Master, and would have rejoiced to save Him from even that burden."

Miss Lydia's face grew interested; intelligence and honesty quickened its worn lines; she did not understand, but she began to suspect there was something in the gospel she had never understood, and desired to know now.

"I don't believe I sense you yet," she said, more gently.

"It is very simple, my friend, if you look at it; it is merely taking Christ's cross instead of your own; that is, taking the troubles He sends and bearing them as He bore His own, because we want to be like Him. Cris-cross ought to be the great blessing of our daily life."

"I don't know as I ever," well, yes; I do know I never thought on't in that light before," said Miss Lydia gravely; "and I don't think I know how just exactly to work it."

"I can tell you how I have tried," answered Mr. Sylver; "and it has been a mighty help to me. Take the Bible and study the gospels; read them over and over. You know already what Christ endured; hunger, cold, thirst, temptation, the loss and desertion of friends; can you find one place where He fretted or complained over these troubles? He does not even allude to His crucifixion as a thing terrible to Himself. He did not go about telling all men how dreadful His sufferings were and would be; what little we know of them is recorded for our benefit only, for our instruction in the way of life. Did you ever think, Miss Lydia, why Christ chose to be poor and lonely, when He might just as well have been a temporal king and still undergone death for us?"

"Well, I never did. I never thought on't much. I read the Bible, too, considerable; but seems to me somehow as if it wasn't like other reading."

Mr. Sylver understood; formalism was his special dread in dealing with just such people; people who "say" their prayers and read their Bible daily and dutifully, but simply as a duty, without apprehension of the divine depth and sweetness in either practice, if only it be done with the heart, not with the head.

It is this which makes the conversion of the heathen an apparently easier matter than the conversion of many church members; the gospel is new, fresh, living, to the ear that has never heard its tender appeals and loving promises before; but where it is simply a ceremony to read the Word of God, and done ceremonially day after day, the pathetic words of the prophet become the modern preacher's adopted utterance, "And lo! thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not." For it is not the poetry, the splendid images, the lofty moral tone of the Scripture that makes it a two-edged sword; but its living truth, and its practical application.

Mr. Sylver went on: "I don't think you are alone in that feeling, Miss Lydia; but think a moment. How could Christ have given in any other way such abundant force and help to us as by suffering all things that we suffer, even the lowest and the poorest of us, so that we can never say 'I cannot carry daily troubles to God; He is too great to understand them.' You know what Paul says to the Hebrews: 'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are; and this for the very purpose of making known to us his sympathy and power to help in all things.' This was part of His cross; the cross on which He lived; perhaps as hard to endure as that on which He died."

Miss Lydia looked strangely moved; her religion had been that of form and routine; a "desire to be as good as she knew how to be," and a very honest desire, but so far it had not led her, as every such intent will lead sooner or later, to the foot of the cross.

"It is as good as three sermons to hear you talk, Mr. Sylver," she said. "I see how blind-like I have read the Scripture along back; but it does seem, nevertheless, as though there was some things that pester you amazingly, that are too small to talk about in that solemn kind of way."

"Then they are too small to be troubles at all," said the minister, smiling; "anything that is a real trouble can be borne cheerfully, silently, bravely, because Christ sends it to us to bear, will certainly turn into a blessing to ourselves or somebody else; it will be Christ's cross instead of cris-cross."

Miss Lydia's mind had been dwelling on the hens, the flies, and all her minor troubles before, but while these last words dropped from the minister's lips her eye fell on the yellow telegram.

"Well," she said, "I thank you kindly, Mr. Sylver, for your talk. I'd thank you a good deal more if you would just give me a word about some trouble that came this morning. I'll fetch the letter first."

While she bustled away the minister looked at his watch; it was late; he was tired; he had much to do that morning; he did not know how to spare Miss Lydia another moment; but he was a man who had learned to be afraid to preach without practising, and for a long time it had been his habit in any doubtful matter to ask himself, "What would Christ have done in this place and these circumstances?" and act accordingly. Not that he could always certainly know, but he read the gospel so much that it seemed to him he could generally tell what would have been the Lord's course of action, and being naturally a considerate, just, and deliberate man, not blinded by impulse or passion, and one who prayed fervently for divine guidance, it is to be presumed that the result of his judgment was as near as humanity can achieve to the Master's example.

This was the secret of Mr. Sylver's great usefulness; he was not a very brilliant or eloquent preacher, but he believed the Word of God with all his heart and acted on it in all his