

An Object Lesson.

(Hattie Lummls in "The Presbyterian.")

'Such a lovely morning, isn't it?'

Christine sighed.
'I suppose it is,' she returned, grudgingly, as if it cost her an effort to make even so simple a concession. 'I'm not in a condition to judge. Oh, papa, I can't eat all that steak. Don't give me more than half as much, and I don't care for any muffins, thank you.'

On the cherry trees outside the window an oriole broke into song, as if his inward ecstasy could no longer be restrained.

Christine sighed.

'The birds waked me so early this morning. Wouldn't it be a relief if they had some sort of discretion as to the right time to begin their serenades. It makes one feel so completely used up to lose one's sleep.'

Some of the hardest habits to overcome are those which fasten themselves upon us by such imperceptible degrees that we never realize we are forming such habits at all. A severe illness more than a year earlier was doubtless primarily responsible for the fact that Christine was given to chronic complaining.

During her tedious convalescence every ache and pain had been a matter of interest to the family in general, while her whims and fancies had been deemed worthy of serious consideration. Christine had enjoyed this atmosphere of affectionate concern. She liked to feel that when a question of great or little moment was to be decided, the thing uppermost in the thoughts of her parents was the effect the decision would have upon herself. And when returning health removed her claim to especial consideration, she attempted to retain her place as the influential member of the household by making much of those little ills which fall to the lot of the most favored.

As she ate her breakfast with the languid air which had become habitual with her, even when her appetite was the best, her brother Rob attempted to create a diversion.

'Great news this morning. We're going to have company.'

Christine regarded him plaintively.

'I wish I might have been consulted first. Unless I feel much better than at present, I shan't care to exert myself making visitors have a pleasant time.'

'This isn't a frivolous kind of company,' returned Rob, with a chuckle. 'And it didn't wait for an invitation; just sent word to expect it in the six o'clock train.'

'It's your great aunt Betsy,' explained Mrs. Morris, casting an anxious glance at her daughter's downcast face. 'And, as Rob says, it is quite unlikely she will care to go about very much. She is almost eighty.'

Christine sighed again.

'I don't know but a sick old lady in the house is even worse. Illness is so depressing.'

Later in the day, however, when she watched Aunt Betsy clamber out from the hack which had brought her from the station, and briskly march up the front walk, Christine admitted that she presented an appearance as far removed as possible from that suggested by the term 'a sick old lady.' Aunt Betsy's eyes were bright, her withered cheeks were tinged with pink, and her alert manner seemed to imply an excellent appreciation of the good things of this present life.

When the family met at the late supper, Christine wore the pensive air she frequently adopted, unconsciously influenced by the fact that it was so likely to provoke sympathetic



questioning. In the present instance it was effective.

'Aren't you feeling well, dear?' asked her mother, anxiously.

'Only a headache,' answered Christine, with a martyr-like intonation hardly justified by the almost imperceptible pain in the region of her temples.

'Headaches!' cried Aunt Betsy, from the other end of the table. 'I guess there's nobody livin' that can tell me much about headaches. When I was a child I used to have a kind of sick headache that would almost scare mother to death. Sometimes I'd be in bed as much as three days with a ragin' fever all the time. The pain was mostly in the top of my head, but sometimes it would creep down to the back of the neck, and keep up a thumpin' and a throbbin' for all the world like a steam engine.'

Christine could not help thinking that this was very tiresome, but her reflection proved no check to Aunt Betsy's flow of eloquence. She seemed to have eighty years of headaches in tabulated form somewhere ready for reference. She told of headaches brought on by indigestion, headaches caused by colds, headaches which were the forerunners of attacks of sickness. With much detail and great exactness she described the remedies which had proved more effective in each instance. All through supper this cheerful subject was continued till Rob, whose sense of humor was sometimes a severe tax on his politeness, found it difficult to preserve an

expression of unvarying sympathy and interest.

During the next week Christine learned some valuable lessons in discretion. If she casually remarked that she had slept poorly, the observation was enough to launch Aunt Betsy on a tide of reminiscence regarding sleeplessness in general. The family were treated to a minute account of a bad night she had passed in the summer of '45, when, having partaken freely of a somewhat indigestible dish, she had been unable to sleep, and so had risen, lighted her lamp, and read till morning. Aunt Betsy's auditors were also allowed to hear a careful comparison of the efficacy of reciting the alphabet backward as a charm to woo unwilling sleep, with the counting of a flock of sheep as the imagination pictures them—in the act of jumping a wall. In each case the subject thus unthinkingly introduced proved too fascinating to be dropped until it was exhausted, along with the patience of the listeners.

Nor were physical afflictions the only sort competent to open the flood-gates of Aunt Betsy's recollections. Christine was sensitive by nature, and having at some unlucky moment discovered that the cultivation of this frame of mind may be the means of gaining many practical benefits, she had become unreasonable and exacting. In spite of some serious faults, Christine was a lovable girl, and her friends bore with this falling so patiently as to prevent her from re-