

The Inglenook.

A Practical Penitent.

BY ELIZABETH PRICE.

That there was a contrast in our rooms I fully realized, but the mistake I made was in thinking it didn't matter. Tom was only a boy at the awkward age, when he was composed principally of long legs and clumsy arms, which he seemed to have forgotten how to manage. He was always knocking things down, or tipping them over, and I trembled every time he touched my belongings for fear something serious would happen. He seemed to realize the danger himself, and seldom crossed the threshold of my sanctum, even before I had dressed it up.

My room is a dear—blue and white. Nobody knows just how I worked and planned and saved to make it what it is. If you had seen me divesting the old furniture of its original finish by means of soda and ammonia, you could have readily accounted for the condition of my hands during the next week. I did it in fear and trembling, too, for grandmother had given a most reluctant consent to my experiment, and if it failed I could expect nothing better than to sleep on a mottled bed, and dress before a pie-bald bureau the rest of my existence. However I didn't fail, and the white enamel paint behaved beautifully.

The little niches in the carving over the looking-glass, where I couldn't get the old stain out perfectly, I covered with dotted swiss drapery that matched the curtains at the windows. Then the floor. How I did stain and oil it, then go over it with pumice stone and oil it again! I even hung the wall-paper myself, for I wouldn't let Tom help—I was afraid to. It looks perfectly sweet, too, though on one breadth one butterfly wing rests on each spray of forge-me-nots, while the other wing of each pair and the fat yellow body repose one-sidedly beneath. I don't know how I ever made such a mistake, but it had to go, for I couldn't get any more paper. I had bought a remnant because it was cheap. Still this was unimportant after all, for the head of the bed covers it nearly all the way up, and a picture hides the rest. It's a picture that looks better hung high—on the principle that "distance lends enchantment to the view." I seldom looked at it anyway, because at that time there hung, where I could see it earliest and latest, a sweet portrait of my mother. It was my dearest treasure—mine, because I am her oldest child; and I knew I'm loved by it, to, by the wistful look he always gave it when he came to my door. He never said anything about it but once, and that was when I went in suddenly and found him standing before it. His lashes were wet, and he said huskily, "Kitty, a fellow couldn't think a bad thought with those eyes on him, could he?" Then he went out quickly. He never says much when he feels most, but his heart is good as gold and true as steel.

Well, I painted all the woodwork white, and I did some pale blue morning glories on the panel of the door, and after everything was done—the cushions and covers in place, the dainty draperies hanging gracefully over the big sunny windows, I could just have cried for pure joy. It had been my dream for years to get my old ugly things out of

the way and new ones in their places. The fact that the furniture I had used was great-grandmother's, and therefore antique, didn't reconcile me in the least to its dark ugliness any more than it helped me to admire the hideous hair-cloth chairs down in the parlor, or the carpet with stiff designs three-quarters of a yard square. I had yearned and dreamed and planned. I'd picked berries and crocheted lace and knitted socks to earn money to buy what had to be bought before I could "turn myself loose," as Tom says.

And now, to think the happy day had come and beside all this, there was in my work-box a ten dollar gold piece that Aunt Hannah had sent for my birthday, which was to add the finishing touch in the shape of a darling rosewood desk, at which I could scribble as much as I pleased, with no one to molest or make me afraid. I had picked it out as an object of my desire months before, but I never expected to own it, for Aunt Hannah's presents are as uncertain as her moods, and I never count on them. I was to go to town the very next day after my room was finished to bring home my treasure.

I stood in the door at last trying to take it all in, too happy to believe what I saw. I dreaded to turn away to the contrast elsewhere, for grandmother—bless her dear heart—is satisfied if things are spick-and-span clean and whole, while grandfather looks askance at "fur belows." You see they were born and raised with another generation when many things were very different from now. A crooked shade or a dusty window-pane grandmother couldn't endure, but the fact that the shade is a ghastly green and the pane set in an ugly blue frame doesn't disturb her in the least. I often try to imagine how things would have been if our own dear parents had lived, yet even that thought seems almost disloyal to the best and most patient of "grand people," as Tom calls them.

Tom came to look over my shoulder as I stood there. "Very fine, ma'am," he said. "Isn't it sweet?" I questioned eagerly, then at a sudden remembrance, "Tom, don't take my towels any more to clean your gun-case. They are new and I don't want 'em spoiled." "Are they new? I'm no end sorry I meddled, but I couldn't find one high or low in my room. If you can manage to keep one on my rack, I'll never bother yours," he promised. I winced. I'd been so absorbed in my own affairs for some time that I had undoubtedly neglected his, but it did seem to me he might have got on somehow without disturbing my things. I said so and added a little crossly, "You think that nothing matters only your old hunting and fishing and gaming. I believe you would as lief wipe your old stogy shoes on my new floor rug as not."

Tom laughed, and asked what it was there in the way for if not to be used, and I retorted, "Just like a man! If a thing isn't good to eat or to put to some immediate practical use, it isn't appreciated. Because you don't know or care whether your room looks like a barn or a wood shed, you think I ought to feel the same!" Now Tom never gets cross with me and perhaps I do presume a little upon that fact, and speak rather plainly sometimes. I love him better than anybody, in spite of his perfectly immense

feet and hands, but it was provoking to find my new blue bordered towel all wadded up in a dirty little roll in one corner of his room. I did feel a little ashamed when my brother looked down on me with a half quizzical, half pathetic expression and said, "I don't care, eh? Don't know when my bed's not made, I suppose, or the dust swept under the bureau and left there? Well some people are very stupid, and I'm evidently one of that brand." Then he turned and sauntered down the hall, whistling "The girl I left behind me."

You could almost have knocked me down with a feather. It was the first time he had ever intimated that he was conscious of my carelessness. Not that I was in the habit of doing things so untidily, but just sometimes when one is in a desperate hurry, it is so easy to slight a little bit where you think it won't make any difference to anybody.

I sat down limply in my little white rocker and thought as hard as I could. Little things that I hadn't noticed at the time, began coming back to my memory—maybe, after all, Tom cared more than I gave him credit for. Gradually I began to dimly guess that I'd been selfish as I had heeded and worked for nobody in the wide world but myself. It didn't matter for grandfather or grandmother, for they were better contented with their own things in their own way than they would be with my alterations. But Tom was young—younger than I by more than a year. Why shouldn't he care for the same things I did, outside of the difference that comes from my having a girl's tastes and his, a boy's?

But even if he hadn't cared or hadn't realized that he cared, wasn't that very fact a reason why I should try to help him to more refining influences, externally as well as internally? And of them all, surely few had a more important place than neatness and order.

At last I went to reconnoiter, after peeping to see that the coast was clear. It was not that I wasn't perfectly familiar with Tom's room, for I knew every inch by heart, but I looked it over with new eyes, as it were. The room itself was pleasant, the wall-paper clean and neat, the carpet well enough, though its rather vivid colors were toned down to unwonted dullness by a coat of undisturbed dust that made me blush. (Grandmother rarely comes up stairs. Her room opens out of the dining-room and I am left to reign supreme on the second floor). The windows were dim, the woodwork dingy; the bed wore an ugly patchwork quilt. A wooden arm-chair with the rocker off, another with its cane seat broken through, a washstand with one castor gone and a broken-nosed water pitcher sitting in the bowl. The bureau without a cover, all strewn with odds and ends that didn't belong there, and hadn't been disturbed for some time. On the table lay tacks and cartridges among collars and ties. The book-shelves held hopeless confusion; Robinson Crusoe standing on his head, Gulliver travelling sidewise, Tom Brown at Rugby doing penance on his face, and Tales of a Wayside Inn preparing to become tales of a wayside Out, as it hung precariously over the extreme edge of the lowest shelf. These were the things I saw.

I'd seen them all—alas—before, but not as I saw it then. I sat down in the uncomfortable chair and looked about, and it tears of joy had almost fallen awhile before, tears of shame and sorrow altogether descended now. My dear, big, awkward, good boy—so true and loyal—so patient and uncomplaining! Then and there I resolved that never