

DOROTHY EVANS; OR, PRACTISE WHAT YOU PREACH.

CHAPTER II.



It was hard to wait, and Dorothy was very glad when Hilda came home, for there was much more hope of something like sympathy and encouragement from Hilda than from Lucy. Ready as Lucy was to find time for Dora's favourite pursuits, she had no faith in their ever yielding any practical results. "It pleases Dora, and she has been really good about helping me." That was all Lucy thought of her sister's studies.

But when Dorothy found that even Hilda had no confidence in her chance of success, her own hopes sank to a very low ebb, and she almost wished that the paper had never been sent, to bring her, perhaps, such a keen disappointment as she knew failure would be.

Hilda's month's holiday soon passed away, and she went back refreshed to her work with Miss Graves, leaving Lucy and Dora to their household cares.

"How shabby we all looked beside Hilda," Lucy said to her sister a few days afterwards. "I can't think how she always manages to be so well-dressed. I'm sure you and I are not fit to be seen, and Alice and Emily have quite outgrown those faded blue frocks; I really can't bear to see them going to church in such things. We must have new dresses and save in something else."

"Take care, Lucy," rejoined Dora cautiously, "I would rather go without a new dress till Christmas if I were you, than have such a fuss with father about money as you have had sometimes. Indeed, for my part, I don't mean to have one. I think it is better to be ever so plain than to be worried and anxious about how to pay for things."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Lucy, "you will go in with the rest. We had better have them all alike, and when one is cut out with the other, they won't take nearly so much material. As to the making, that is a comparative trifle. Oh, Dora, I should like Miss Simpson to make them this time; she is a little dearer, I know, but her fit is lovely. Don't look so grave about it, it is easier to live cheaply in the summer-time, you know, and we shall save a lot in the housekeeping. I'm pretty straight now, and this afternoon you and I will go and choose the stuff."

In vain Dora objected that it was already the middle of August, and that the summer would soon be past. Lucy was so much set upon the plan that the younger sister at length suffered herself to be overruled, and the two went out together on their shopping expedition.

The pretty inexpensive grey stuff which Lucy selected was soon measured out, but Dora, standing by, was shocked and surprised to hear her sister request that the goods might be entered, instead of paying at once for them.

"Oh, Lucy!" she said, as soon as they had left the shop, "why didn't you pay now? It would have been ever so much better."

Lucy looked annoyed.

"There were some other little things entered that I had the week before last," she answered presently. "I thought these might just as well be put down too, and then Mr. Scott can send us a bill at Michaelmas; it will come to just the same as though we paid now."

"But I am sure it will not," responded Dora, "and you never told me that you had bought any other things at Scott's; why didn't you let me put them down in our book?"

"What a dreadful preacher you are getting to be, Dora," grumbled Lucy. "The money will be all right, I tell you. Between you and father I have

no peace or rest; it is shocking to be continually worried about every shilling one spends. You will be glad to wear your new dress, although you make such ado about its being bought."

Dora shook her head, but she thought it useless to say any more, and the sisters went the rest of their way in almost total silence.

Miss Simpson surpassed herself, and Alice and Emily were delighted with their nice new dresses; but Mr. Evans looked surprised and hardly pleased, when on Sunday morning he saw his four daughters arrayed for church.

"New frocks!" he said to Lucy. "I hope, Lucy, you are paying your way and not getting into any difficulties. Remember there is no more money to come than you have had already."

"Oh, it will be right, father," said Lucy quickly. "Don't you think we look very nice in these dresses, and they are made of such cheap stuff that you would hardly believe how little the material cost?"

That was quite true, but Lucy herself was staggered when Miss Simpson's bill came in. There were so many extras, and the charges for making were so high, that the total looked positively alarming, and Lucy began to experience that late repentance which her thoughtless purchases often caused her.

"I almost wish we hadn't had these dresses," she said to Dorothy. "Miss Simpson's bill is much more than I thought it would be, and there is Scott's to come. Oh, Dora, it is miserable to be so poor!"

Dora thought the present misery lay rather in imprudence than poverty, but she was too kind to say so, and besides, she blamed herself for having yielded about her own dress, and for not having withstood Lucy more upon the whole question. She could only wish more and more for September to come, with its delightful possibility of success. "If the judges only knew what the money would be to me," she thought. "But, even if they did, of course they would not be influenced by any such consideration. I can only hope that the paper was good enough in itself to impress them."

But when September came there was a sad disappointment for Dorothy, though not a final one.

Opening the *Teacher's Magazine* to read her fate, she found under the heading, "Essay Competition," the following words: "The Editor sincerely regrets that, owing to the number of papers sent in, and to the indisposition of one of the judges, the award in the Competition cannot be announced this month. The result will now be made known in our November issue."

Two months more to wait! Dora felt how true it is that "hope deferred makes the heart sick." For a day or two she was quite low-spirited, and could hardly force herself to go through the daily tasks, which were heavier than usual just at that time. Mary Anne, the maid, had had an accident to one of her fingers, and for a week or two was nearly disabled, and Lucy and Dora found it almost more than they could manage to get through everything themselves.

But perhaps the extra work prevented Dora from dwelling too much upon the

disappointment, and she was soon quite herself again.

As the end of September drew near it became very evident that Lucy was suffering under some ill-suppressed anxiety. She parried her sister's inquiries about money, and, though she still allowed the daily record of expenses to be made, she absolutely refused to say how much of the quarter's allowance remained in hand.

"Do be quiet, Dora!" she answered pettishly, one evening, "I am fearfully worried about things, as you might see, and I am expecting every day that Mr. Scott will send in his bill for those wretched dresses. If father sees it there will be no end of trouble."

"But I thought you meant to save it out of the housekeeping, Lucy," said Dora, with a heavy heart. Was it possible that her sister had not done so?

"Save it!" exclaimed Lucy, and without further explanation she burst into sudden tears.

Dora was distressed and frightened.

"Lucy, dear," she cried, "you had better tell father about it yourself. He will not be so vexed as though you concealed things from him, and I shall take care to say that I was partly to blame."

But Lucy shook her head. "I shall not say a word, unless father finds it out," she answered as soon as she could speak. "Mr. Scott would wait, I should think; I know people who owe bills for six months, or even a year, and don't think much of it either. Besides, if one could only get a little time something might turn up."

"I don't know what you think might turn up," said Dora with indignation; "unless the money dropped from the clouds there is no chance of its coming."

As soon as she had spoken she remembered that barely possible ten pounds, but she had too much good sense to hold out such a vague hope to Lucy.

The dreaded bill duly arrived, but Lucy took it herself from the postman, and put it carefully by with Miss Simpson's unpaid account, trusting, as people of her temperament so often do, to the chapter of accidents, and hoping that the quarterly settling with her father might pass over without any uncomfortable questions.

It was a foolish hope, and one not likely to be fulfilled; preoccupied and absent as Mr. Evans often was, he had not forgotten the grey dresses.

"Is this all, Lucy?" he said as Lucy finished her statement, which showed a little money remaining in hand. "What about those new frocks which you and the other girls had? Have you paid for them, and yet got something over? It is a new thing for you if you have done so?"

Lucy was far from being a high-principled girl, as her previous conduct will have shown, but even she could not tell a direct falsehood; she coloured deeply and was silent.

But her father's suspicions being once aroused, he insisted upon knowing the whole truth, and the matter ended, as might have been predicted, in the production of the bills, and in poor Lucy's total discomfiture.

"This is shocking," Mr. Evans said, going once more over Miss Simpson's long list of trimmings and extras. "I have no means of meeting these charges myself at present. If you go on like this you will soon make me insolvent; I don't feel that I shall ever be able to trust you again. Why, if you and your sisters were really in need of clothes, did you not tell me that you had no means of getting