

The Inglenook.

The Force of Habit.

BY MARGARET MEREDITH.

During a destructive flood in Oklahoma, this paragraph appeared in *Enid Eagle*: "The force of habit was forcibly illustrated by an incident last week at the pumping station of the water works at Enid. A tank standing just outside of the building is kept full of water for accommodation of passers-by and neighborhood stock. A cow accustomed to drink at this tank came for her morning drink. The valley was covered with water to within two or three inches of the top of the tank, but the cow went over the waste of water to the tank. Twice she stuck in the mud and appeared to be in danger of drowning, but by perseverance she finally reached the objective point. After drinking long and copiously she turned about and slowly made her way to land, apparently satisfied that she had done the only available thing to find water."

That clipping I have kept about me; not to amuse me by any means, but because it is so keenly true a picture of myself, in the absurd unbelievable power of habit upon me.

Do you feel, nothing of this in yourself—or very little? Do your actions proceed sensibly, logically, for cause as the twenty-four hours of the day go by? Or do you find yourself against your every intention and wish, dropping now and again into "the rut" of former days, and waking up too late to inaugurate, this time, the improved, different mode of procedure which you have planned definitely every day for ten years past?

I am not speaking of right or wrong only: the acts may, like the silly cow's, be quite innocent, but less satisfactory than you could have made them. But when it is a matter of right and wrong, how bitter many a time is the pain caused to us and to others by the irremediable habit—or I should rather say, "the so seldom repressed habit"—which we have allowed to form itself! The temper and tongue, how little willing we are in our hearts that they behave as they do. And we might have brought them into right ways long ago. We must now.

I wonder how—apart from prayer. Is not this about the idea: we say a sharp word; a "cruel," a "mean" word we hear really rightly call it, and we feel sorry and instantly resolve to do better ever afterward; and actually expect that we shall. Now is not that preposterous? To take a plunge along a ruinously bad rut, realize with peculiar force that it is ruinously bad and simply stay there; stay there ready to take another plunge along it when the next provocation gives us the impetus.

Should we not attend to the "doing better" this time? Not trusting to next time? Should we not set to work to think how best we can unsay that word, and then compel ourselves to thus unsay it? Very humiliating, but right: intensely hard, but not so hard as improving by waiting till next time.

And then it has a splendid reward in another way. I knew one sweet woman who habitually "took back" the unreasonably angry words which occasionally—only once in a long while—she uttered; and those straightforward unsayings of what had been meanwhile stinging and rankling, not only restored good feeling and mutual happiness, but especially intensified it, were to those

who lived beside her the sweetest moments of all her sweet behavior and did more than any others to settle in them respect and reverence for her and delight in her companionship and love for her.

I told of her once to a good mother who was mourning her hasty injustices of speech. She cried out against the inexpediency of "apologizing" to her own child, but I argued from observation, so she considered the idea, and next day she said to me: "I found out that it worked like a charm, I tried it. It was touching to see Mamie when I had got the word."

Not only wrong words, but wrong acts can be undone; many a mean little bit of revenge, many a slighted duty, many a selfishness, many a cruelty. Horribly hard even on paper, but each resolute, real undoing lifts us out over the edge of that rut and gives us a better chance for our future. —Presbyterian Banner.

The Faith of Little Hans.

BY EDITH MILLER.

A fierce wind came sweeping around the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue one morning in the winter of '84; down the deserted street it rushed, whirling the freshly fallen snow into little light heaps, then scattering it madly in every direction. Against this storm a young woman was making what progress she could toward the postoffice. A pair of dark eyes and a very pink nose were all that were visible above her wrappings. "I must hurry," she thought, as she glanced up at the great clock, and in a few minutes she was at her desk in the Dead-letter office. Her work was to open and read all the letters whose destination could not be found from the envelope, and whose contents often reveal the desired address.

What a motley pile it was that lay before her! Here was one from a broken-hearted father begging a wayward son to come home, and telling him that his voice and smile alone could remove the dear melancholy that had settled upon the dear old mother.

Here was another from some queer old gentleman full of the small-talk and scandal of his own village, and touching upon political scandal then rife in the city where his letter had found lodgment.

There were letters full of the vivacity of the school-girl, letters full of the burning love of the college boy, letters whose prim upright hand and gossipy nature suggested spinsterhood, letters to convulse you with laughter, and letters that would give you the headache. Yet, strange to say, not one of these eager correspondents had taken the pains to write the correct address on the envelope that contained so much that seemed to be of the greatest importance. Perhaps they were too much absorbed in what they had said from their hearts to take thought for the formal writing on the outside.

The young clerk had worked her way down through a large heap, and was beginning to think of lunch, when she came upon a peculiar little envelop addressed in German to "Jesus in Heaven;" she tore it open hastily, and found a soiled sheet written all over in a child's cramped hand. Some of the words seemed blurred with tears, and she could scarcely make them out.

Here is the translation:

"Dear Jesus,—I have prayed so hard to you, but I guess you could not hear me so far off, so I am going to write you a letter. We came over a big ocean when it was summer-time. My mamma has been sick all the time. Can't you send her something to make her well? And, dear Jesus, please send my papa some work to do, so he can buy us some warm clothing and something to eat, and please do it quick, for we are cold and hungry."

"Nobody knows I am writing to you. I thought you might send us something for a surprise."

"Hans Brahm.
"P. S.—My hands are so cold I can't write very much."

Katrina's eyes were filled with tears as she came to the end. She sat for some time with the letter in her hand; as she folded it she resolved to do something to make the little boy happy. She said, "whatever his parents may be, this beautiful child faith must not be destroyed." That evening after dinner she told several of her friends about the matter, and they were eager to help her make up a box.

It was ready in a few days. There were some flannels for the mother and little Hans, comfortable clothes for the father, and toys enough to make the boy believe that the Christ Child did not live in Germany only. At the very top lay a crisp ten-dollar bill. As soon as the box left the house Katrina wrote a letter to Hans. She told him his letter had been received, and that Jesus had sent one of his servants on earth to help him, and that a nice box was on its way out West.

Not long after there came a letter of warm thanks from the father. He explained how they had been in the country but a few months, and had not yet found work.

As the weeks went by, another and another letter came, telling of fairer prospects and brighter days. One thing they assured Katrina—"that they could never forget her kind letter and generous help in the time of saddest need."

—Harper's Young People.

Habits.

Ned was watching grandpa put on his shoes. "Why do you turn 'em over to shake 'em before you put 'em on?" he asked.

"Did I?" said grandpa.

"Why yes, you did; but I didn't see anything come out. I have to shake the sand out of my shoes most every morning."

Grandpa laughed. "I didn't notice that I shook my shoes, Ned; but I got in the habit of shaking my shoes every time before putting them on when I was in India."

"Why did you do it there?"

"To shake out scorpions, or centipedes, or other vermin that might be hidden in them."

"But you don't need to do it here, for we don't have such things."

"I know; but I formed the habit, and now I do it without thinking."

"Habit is a queer thing, isn't it?" said Ned.

"It's a very strong thing," said grandpa, "remember that, my boy. A habit is a chain that grows stronger every day, and it seems as if a bad habit grows strong faster than a good one. If you want to have good habits when you are old, form them while you are young, and let them be growing strong all the while you live."
—Mayflower.