

Gloriana.

OR

The Revolution of 1900

Lady Florence Dixie

I.

SYSTEM IN WORK.

“I HAVE been hard at work all day,” we think we hear some say; “up stairs and down, from the cellar to the attic, looking into every nook and corner, and ‘putting things to rights’ generally. O dear! I *wonder what next* those grim old housekeepers would expect me to take hold of. I have everything in good running order, as far as I can see, and now how I would like to take a book and curl up somewhere, out of sight and hearing, and have one of the old-fashioned good times I used to have before I was married. Well, I don’t care. I mean to have it, anyhow, and just let things go on without my watching, for a while. Nora can manage to keep the house in order, *somehow*, now I have everything in its right place, I am sure.”

Ah! but, my dear little woman, if you do not give daily attention to your household affairs, in a few days, under Nora’s rule, you will find the machinery all out of order, and be compelled again to go over the same wearisome labor you now complain of.

“What then am I to do? From this time on, is my life to be a perpetual drudgery?”

No; not if you are wise. Be patient. It is a new thing to you now. Care does not sit lightly on young shoulders;

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but time and a reasonable amount of patience will soon make the “crooked ways straight, and the rough places smooth.” A few weeks of extra time and thought, at the beginning of your new life, will teach you how to work methodically. Until this lesson is fixed in your mind, it will be “uphill work”; but persevere. Have a regular plan for each day’s work, and every step will be easier and more natural.

There is nothing like method and regularity to lighten labor. We have so many poor, discouraged, repining housekeepers, chiefly because they were not taught from the beginning to work methodically. Let this once become a fixed habit, and almost every one can find leisure for reading and recreation, certainly if in a position where they can delegate the hardest, roughest labor, under suitable supervision, to a servant.

Secure a few moments every evening to think over and arrange for the necessary labor of the morrow. Bring before your mind just what ought to be done, and fix the mode and time for doing it distinctly. While dressing, the next morning, review your plan, that all through the day it may be like a map spread out before your eyes. Of course, many things may occur that no foresight could provide for,—sickness, unexpected company, or interruptions past your control,—but nothing that can wholly derange a well-digested plan for every day’s duties.

Try this mode of working resolutely for a few months, and labor or oversight of labor will become so nearly a second nature that you will arrange, or perform almost instinctively, even with pleasure, that which now seems a heavy burden, grievous to be borne. To show just what may be done, let us take a glance at the arrangements for washing and ironing days.

Every housekeeper has her own way of apportioning the work of her servants. Where there are three girls, many

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prefer that the cook should take charge of the washing, leaving either waiter or chambermaid to do the cooking Mondays and Tuesdays. If these are tolerable plain cooks, this may answer; but, generally, on those two days the table is less pleasantly served than during the remainder of the week.

Now, we prefer to feel as sure of a well-cooked and well-served dinner on "washing-day" as on any other day in the week. For that reason, we think it a more excellent way to have the cook understand that the kitchen, pantries, and cooking are her own especial care; from which, until that work is done, she is not to be called to assist in anything else. This plan, we think, insures a more orderly kitchen, cleaner pantries, and better prepared and more regular meals, than when the cooking is given over, two days in the week, to one less accustomed to it. We see no good reason why, if company happens in unexpectedly, one should not be as well prepared to serve them on Monday as on Wednesday or Thursday. By giving the washing into the care of the second girl, we think one may escape most of the terrors of "washing-day."

Early rising should be one of the well-understood rules of the house, for the servants at least. As soon as up, on Monday morning, the laundress's first work is to light the fire, if the laundry is separate from the kitchen; if not, the cook, of course, attends to that. The furnace is then to be well shaken and cleaned out, fresh coal added, and the ashes sifted and removed; which, if done every day, as it should be, is but a small item comparatively. Sweeping the front stairs, hall, doorsteps, sidewalk, and gutters comes next in order. By this time the fire and water will be in a proper state to commence washing; and that once begun, the laundress should be exempt from any other duty, save to feed the furnace, until the washing is finished and the clothes brought in and folded.

On Tuesday the same routine, while the fire is kindling

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and the irons heating; after that the laundress gives her undivided attention to her ironing. She should be up in season to finish sweeping stairs, hall, etc., and commence her washing and ironing by seven; and then, unless the washing is very large, an ordinarily bright girl should have all finished by Tuesday night, and be ready to give her full time to the chamber-work,—making beds, sweeping, dusting, washing windows, etc., during the remainder of the week.

The waitress is often expected to take charge of the furnace, but we cannot think it is desirable. If there is a fire to be lighted in the parlor or sitting-room, to remove the ashes, wash the hearth, and have the rooms dusted and in readiness for the family, and then put her table in order, is all that she will be likely to do well. Besides, after working in the cellar over the furnace, she cannot be fit to wait on the table without taking more time to free her hair and dress from ashes and dirt than she can spare, if you would have the breakfast served promptly. And what is more disgusting than an untidy waitress? The waitress should have charge of parlor, dining-room, silver, answering the bell, and on Monday and Tuesday do the chamber-work.

Where but two servants are kept,—and we are inclined to think the fewer servants the better the work is done,—of course the two must divide the work, each assisting in the washing and ironing, but the cook still retaining the charge of the meals.

II.

MARCH.

THE morning sun shines brightly, the air is mild and balmy; you go about your early cares with a cheerful spirit; and, after seeing that the “pickings up,” the brushing and dusting, which are a daily necessity, are faithfully performed, you sit down to your sewing, your books, or your writing in a satisfied and comfortable state of mind. But in a few hours the sky grows dark; grim and threatening clouds obscure the sun; the wind sweeps round the house with long, wailing moans, or short, fierce gusts, while you shiveringly draw the warm breakfast shawl closer about you, and find that you have suddenly passed into a far less genial atmosphere than you enjoyed in the morning.

March may come in a very mild and gentle manner, but don't trust it. It is “fooling you.” Its smiles are quickly followed by frowns, and the bright, warm sunlight all too soon will be forced to give place to fierce winds and drifting snows. We are quite as well pleased when this, the first month of spring, appears in its own proper character,—windy, stormy, and bitter cold,—for then we hope that it will make its exit in a gentler mood.

Yes, this is truly *March*,—cold, raw, and blustering March,—which, with the early days of April, before the winds have fairly died out, is the terror of all careful housekeepers,—insuring an abundance of extra work; for its winds and storms will force an entrance into every part of the house, however securely guarded. No burglar's alarm can promise safety from this insidious foe. Windows, pictures, and furniture, so nicely cleaned and polished but a few hours since, require

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a repetition of the same work many times a day. No month in the whole year demands such incessant use of dusters, brushes, and brooms,—such unslumbering watchfulness.

Why not clean once a day and then let the dust be till next morning?

Because, if allowed to remain, it soils your hands and dresses, spoils your pictures, finds lodgment in your finely carved statuary, or settles in the graceful designs or rich upholstery of your furniture. Once snugly secreted in woollen or plush, dust is not easily removed, but becomes the favorite resort for moths, affording abundant material for all their wants. There is no month in the whole year which so completely makes you the slave of the broom and dusting-brush. If there is a carpenter ingenious enough to build a house so tight that it can defy the searching winds of March, he would most certainly be a universal favorite among all housekeepers. Under the doors, from the top, bottom, and sides of the windows, in at the key-holes,—everywhere the dust finds an entrance. No table, chair, or shelf may be touched without showing the presence of this subtle enemy. Each book, picture, or article of dress acknowledges its power. Was it not in the month of March that the *plague of dust* tormented the Egyptians? Unless some learned interpreter of the Bible can prove the contrary, we are inclined to accept this idea. There is no other season of the year when one feels so little courage, for we cannot “rest from our labors.” However faithfully the work may be done, an hour will destroy all trace of our industry. Then why attempt to do it? Why not let all cleaning cease till March gives place to its betters, and then have a general purification?

If there were no other reason for patient continuance in well-doing, notwithstanding all discouragements, the injury done to carpets and furniture would be a good and sufficient one. With the strong March winds the dust is so thoroughly

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sifted into the threads of carpets, and into the moldings and ornaments of furniture, that if not very often removed, it would be almost impossible ever to do it. The sharp grains of dust would sink into the carpets, and the friction of walking over them would wear out the material more in this month than in any two months of the year. Heavy brocatelle curtains and delicate lace are very easily defaced and injured by the dust, if not often shaken and freed from the constant accumulation.

It cannot be helped; through all this windy, unmanageable season, frequent usings of dusters and brushes are inevitable, and, if thoroughly applied, aside from the economy of it, will greatly lighten the labor of the spring house-cleaning.

A good beating with a furniture *whip* (two or three ratans, lightly braided or twisted together, and the ends united in a handle, found at any house-furnishing store) is an excellent thing to dislodge dust from chairs, sofas, table-covers, mattresses, etc., but the beating must be followed by the use of the feather-brush over all, and an old silk handkerchief for polished or highly varnished furniture.

Windows are very difficult to keep bright and clean at this season of the year. If there is rain or snow, it is usually followed by high winds, which dry the streets and very soon cover the damp windows with a storm of dust,—settling into the molding and around the sash to such a degree that it will require much time and hard work to remove; and even while washing them, the dust is still swept over the windows. It is wise, when windows are so quickly and easily defaced, to wet a clean, smooth cloth in a little whiskey or alcohol, and cleanse the glass with it. It removes the dirt much more thoroughly and gives a better polish to the glass than water can, and evaporates so quickly that the dust will not so readily adhere. This may be liable to objections on the ground of economy; but, for three or four weeks it is much more

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effective, and makes the work so much easier, that we are inclined to think it is not extravagant. Of course it must be used with judgment. A little will be sufficient.

Now, more than any other part of the year, the ashes must be removed from the cellar, if you have a furnace, faithfully every morning. If allowed to accumulate, a heavy wind will send them up through the flues and registers, to settle in the carpets or furniture, and do more injury than the dust, because the alkali in the ashes will eat the texture and injure the colors.

Then, again, it is important that on washing-days some attention should be paid to the wind. It is a great trial to a methodical housekeeper to put off the week's washing for a day or two. It seems to derange all the work planned for other days, and makes one feel unsettled, as if everything was sadly out of joint. It is not at all pleasant to consent to such innovation, but March is a tyrant, and in the end it is better to submit to its caprices. To see all your clothes on the line at the mercy of a real March wind, would be worse than to defer the washing and wait for a milder day. The clothes will be more injured and worn by one day's snapping on the line, in a very high wind, than in weeks of wear; and unless one has a good,

roomy attic with windows at each end to admit free air, it is wise, if not agreeable, to put the clothes in soak, after washing, in plenty of clear water, and wait for the calm, or defer the entire washing to that propitious moment.

Yet a good, brisk March wind, with an unclouded sky, has its excellences. There is no better time to put blankets, carriage-robos, and heavy winter garments out to air. If not left out too long, such heavy articles will not be liable to so much injury, by whipping on the lines, as cotton and linen, and it is an excellent and effective way to free these cumbrous garments from dust and moths.

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These are only a few of the reasons for the necessity of more than usual vigilance in this stormy month of March; they are but *hints* to call attention to the subject. Your own good sense, kept awake by the wild wind that is shaking the windows as we write, and bending the tall masts beyond, will enable you to carry them out more minutely and practically than we shall attempt at present to do.