

JOHN BOGGS' BARN DOOR: OR THE effects of Procrastination.

"It is too bad," said John Boggs. "What is too bad?" said Matilda, his wife. "Why, the cart is broken down, and now all the hands must stand idle while it is being mended."

"The cart!" repeated Mrs. Boggs, laying down the stocking she was darning, and regarding her husband with a peculiar look. "Do you mean the large ox cart?"

"Yes." "What is the matter with it?" "Why, the hub is split right slap in two halves."

"But I thought it began to split a long time ago. I heard you say last week that you must have a new iron band made for that old hub."

"Yes, I know I did say something about it, but then I think it was too bad."

"Yet, you knew it needed mending, John, for you said so yourself. I wish you would learn to be more prompt about such things. You lose more than you are aware of."

"O, no, Tiddy, I don't lose anything. Everything on my place is as well as things generally are."

"Not quite, John. I know you manage to keep things in pretty good order, but you must acknowledge that you are in the habit of procrastinating. It is only last week that you lost a valuable sheep, just because you put off mending the floor in the shed. And now you have lost a half a day's work of three hands just because you did not mend your cart hub when it ought to have been mended. Ah, you do lose much, and there is no use trying to hide it."

"Well, complaining won't mend it, that is sure," muttered John.

"No; but paying heed to your experience will mend the whole trouble," quickly but pleasantly returned Matilda.

"Pooh! You sit here in the house darning stockings, and I suppose you think, because you can see where to run your needle, you could see everything in the barn at once."

"No, no, John," said the wife smiling. "You do not put it in the right shape. I can see the heel of a stocking, and when I see a place where my needle needs to run, I run it there. I do not expect to see but one thing at a time, but when you do see that thing, and also that it needs mending, then is the time to mend it."

John Boggs commenced to whistle a medley of spasmodic notes and at the same time drew on his coat. He had got to go five miles to a blacksmith's and have an iron ring made for the hub.

"John," said the wife, plying her darning-needle as she spoke, "now mark my words, if you do not turn over a new leaf in this respect, you will have a lesson one of these days, that will cost you more than you can afford to pay."

John whistled with renewed energy, now striking fairly into Yankee Doodle, and with a dubious shake of her head his wife turned her attention to her work.

John Boggs had two men to work for him, and by this breaking of the cart they were either obliged to lie still or go to some work which was of little use. He had a large farm and an excellent one for producing vegetation, and he was quite "well to do" in the world. His children were all daughters and hence the business of the farm all depended upon him.

As we have seen, John Boggs had one fault. He would put off until to-morrow what could and should be done to-day. He contrived to keep his place looking neat and tidy, because at certain periods he would be seized with a sort of renovating fit, and would then roll up his sleeves and go to it. But this don't work always. Many times very important things were left till he "felt like it." That was a great expression of his: "Well, when I feel like it."

Sometimes there would be a break-down that had to be attended to immediately; and while he had the hammer and nails in his hands, he would fix up several other things that had been awaiting his coming. Very often an hour was required over something which would not have consumed over five minutes of his time, had he taken it in hand when he first discovered it. And not only so, but he lost in two ways; it required more nails to do the work at this late hour, and could never be made so good, at that, as it were before, nor as the same would have been, had he attended to it in season.

John had often promised his wife that he would reform, but he had not done it yet. He did not realize how much he lost, or if he did, the effect was but momentary. When he lost his sheep he would never let such a thing go again. And yet there was at this very moment, a bad place in the floor on the tie-up, where the cows were kept. He had noticed it three days before. He saw one of the cows tread upon it, and he knew that a heavy ox would break through there at once. But the floor was not mended yet for all that.

When the ring or hub band came home, Mr. Boggs went at work to put it on. But it would not work. He had missed a figure in his calculations. The spokes had worn in the sockets so much that all the straps in the world could never fit that broken hub on again.

"Jerusalem!" muttered the disappointed man, as he found that he could not make the thing work. "If I had only fixed the thundering thing when I ought to, this would not have been. It is too bad—too all thundering bad."

But there was no help for it. A new hub must be made. He managed to find an old wheel which he could use while thewright was fixing his, and in this uncomfortable way he managed to get along without losing much over a day's time.

One morning, about a week after the breaking of the hub, one of the little girls came running in while the whole family were at breakfast—

"Papa!—papa! the white-faced heifer has broke through the floor!"

"What! broken through?" muttered Boggs, starting up.

John Boggs knew that his wife was looking sharply at him, and he avoided the peculiar glance which he felt sure he should find there if he turned that way. He called up the two men and hurried out. As good fortune would have it, the heifer was not seriously injured; but John knew he could not claim credit for her safety. When he came back, his wife said not a word upon the subject. At first John was afraid she would reprimand him, but when he found that she kept silent upon the subject, he felt worse than he would have felt had she just chided him a little. He knew she felt it—that she understood it—and her continued silence seemed to indicate that she considered him incorrigible. From that moment he resolved that he would reform. Ah! he had made just such resolutions a great many times before.

For two months no real accident happened, for John Boggs kept things pretty straight, but still there were some short comings. The habit of procrastination was too firmly fixed upon him to be easily thrown off.

As Autumn drew near, John Boggs began to look around for an opportunity to carry into execution a plan he had been considering for some time. He had a very choice stock of cattle, and having received an excellent offer for them, he could buy them in the spring to good advantage. So he sold eight oxen for a price which might by some be considered almost fabulous. The same purchaser wanted horses, and John sold his three heavy ones, keeping only a three year old colt, which he thought would answer for all his riding thro' the winter.

Very near John's farm was a large tract of land covered with heavy pine trees—most of them magnificent white pines; and he had partly contracted to cut those trees down, fashion the logs, and haul them a distance of three miles to the river. The contract would be a valuable one for him, because he lived so near to the wood. He supposed he could find plenty of men who would be glad to come on and furnish teams, if he would keep them. He had hay and grain in plenty and, of course, wished to have most of it eaten up on the place. By selling his own oxen and horses he had made a clear profit of about one-half of all he got for them, and now, if he could get some one to come on and furnish teams, and in return, take one-half of the proceeds of the job, and have their animals kept, he would do well. But he found it more difficult than he had expected to obtain help. He could find plenty of men who would gladly come with such teams as they owned, but they wanted heavier ones.

At length he hit upon the very man that he wanted:

"I have found him," he said one evening to his wife, on his return from a visit to a neighboring town. "I have found just the man. He has got teams enough, and will come as soon as wanted."

"Who is he?" asked Matilda, quite pleased with her husband's success.

"Aaron Rolf. You know him, don't you?—He has got six yoke of oxen and four good horses, and says if I will give him equal shares of what I am to have, and take care of the animals and men, he will come."

"Aaron Rolf?" repeated his wife, "I know him well. If he says he will come, then you may depend on him. He never makes a promise until he knows he can keep it, and he never undertakes to do a thing which he can not do as it should be done. Some call him odd, and I do not know but he is, in one sense of the word, for he minds his own business, and will have no one about him if he can help it, who will not follow his example."

"Why, you seem to know him well, Tiddy."

"Why should I not? You forget that I lived in his father's family for a number of years."

"O ho! Is he a son of old Benjamin Rolf?"

"Yes, his eldest boy."

"Aha—that is it, eh? Well, I am glad he is such a man. It will make it so good for me."

"I should like to have him here very well this coming fall and winter—that is, if you must have some one."

So John Boggs gave himself no more uneasiness upon the subject of the fall's work. Mr. Rolf was coming over to look at the timber before closing the bargain, but then John had explained fully to him, and he was perfectly satisfied.

One day, John went to tie his colt up in the stall, and he found that the edge of the trough was worn almost down to the hole through which the halter was tied. He knew that it was not safe. A slight pull would break it out.

"I declare, I must fix that when I get time," said he to himself.

He meant when he felt like it, for he had ample time then. All that was necessary was to step to the wagon house and get an inch and a half augur and bore a new hole. It would have taken him, perhaps, five minutes to have performed the whole operation. He led the colt into the next stall, and then went to the house and sat down. Ah—the old habit was not gone yet. He would fix the tie hole when he had time. John Boggs had not quite reformed, for all his place looked so well outside.

An evening or two afterward, just as he was sitting down to supper, one of his daughters

came in and told him that the back barn-door had tumbled down again.

"Why, I set a log of wood up against it firmly only a little while ago," exclaimed John.

"Then I guess some of the sheep must have rubbed it down," said the girl.

"John Boggs, haven't you fixed that door yet?" spoke the wife almost sternly.

"I declare I will fix that to-morrow," was John's response.

"But why haven't you fixed it before?" persisted Matilda.

"Why, I have not had time."

John held down his head as he made this remark.

"Have not had time? John Boggs, what do you mean?" repeated the dame, elevating her eyebrows in real astonishment.

"Why, I did mean to fix it, but whenever I have thought of it, it has been when I was busy about something else."

"Ah, John, let me tell you that kind of work will not suit Aaron Rolf."

"Let Aaron Rolf mind his business, and there are other folks that might do the same to advantage," returned John, warmly, with a bold look into his wife's face.

Matilda Boggs smiled, for she saw that her husband was playing the bravo—a thing which he seldom did in her presence. Not that she was the wearer of garments unmentionable, but she was one of those straight forward, sound-sensed, stern-virtued women, who find it absolutely necessary to govern an easy husband sometimes. She had intended to ask her lord to go out and fix the door after supper, but as he was already chafed, she concluded to say no more at present.

The facts about the barn door were these: the lower hinge had been useless over two weeks, but had been made to work by being careful in opening and closing the door. But some three days had elapsed since the upper one became so loose that no dependence could be placed upon it. John had noticed it, and he had said to himself—

"It must be fixed."

And he had resolved to do it when he felt like it.

The next day came, and in the morning John Boggs went out to the barn and passed thro' into the yard. He set the back door up after him, and braced the stout cord stick against it to hold it in its place.

"I declare that must be fixed. I will attend to that right off."

He went out into the field, and when he came back he went over to a neighbor's to see about some help, and remained there till dinner time. Just as they were sitting down to dinner, Aaron Rolf drove up to the door. One of the hired men took his horse and he came in, where he was warmly welcomed by John and his good wife.

In the afternoon, the two men went out to the timber land, and it was nearly dark when they returned. They had seen the whole lot, and Mr. Rolf was much pleased with the proposed plan in every way. As near as they could calculate, it would take them, with themselves and four other men, and six yokes of oxen and four horses, a hundred days, perhaps more, but surely no less. Rolf found that his share of the proceeds would amount to eight hundred dollars. Then from this he was to pay the two men he must bring on, saving him six hundred dollars for his oxen, horses, and himself, but as he would be at no expense at all in feeding anybody or anything, he considered the remuneration just fair and right.

"I can have more than that for hauling goods for our new Railroad Company," he said, "but I should have to be away from home all the time, and I do not like it. I like this plan. I can go home as often as I please, and I feel perfectly free to remain away a day if I wish."

During the evening it was all planned, and before they retired, Aaron Rolf had about made up his mind that he should sign the articles of agreement. It was arranged that they should go to the justice and have them legally drawn. John Boggs thought there would be no need of any such paper, but Mr. Rolf thought differently. Said he:

"We may forget, but a written paper can't forget."

And upon this they retired for the night. In the morning, Mr. Rolf got up and went out to snuff up the fresh air. Having washed and combed his hair, he thought he would go down and look at his horse, and perhaps give him some water. He saw one of the hired men, and asked him if he had watered the animal. It had not been done. So he went on to the barn. He found the stable where he had seen the man hitch his horse the night before—but the horse was gone. He went through to the back of the barn and found the door not only open, but flat upon the ground. He went into the yard, and there he found the bars down. He hunted up the hired man.

"Look ye, my man, have you seen anything of my horse?"

"No, sir."

"Just come here."

The man followed Rolf to the empty stall.

"Did you hitch my horse there last night?" the visitor asked, pointing to where the hole had been broken out.

"Yes, sir."

"Didn't you know that would not hold a horse?"

"I supposed Mr. Boggs had fixed it, sir. I heard him say two or three days ago he must do it when he had time. It was kind o' dark when he hitched the horse, and I did not notice."

"Fix it when he had time!" repeated Rolf in surprise. "Hasn't he an augur?"

"Yes, sir."

"And hasn't he had five minutes to spare within three days?"

"Yes, sir—a good many of 'em, I should think."

"But how about this door out here; didn't you know that was unsafe?"

"Yes, sir. It's been so a long while. But Mr. Boggs said he'd fix it when he had time, so never touched it."

"Who lugged that great log of wood round here to hold it with?"

"Mr. Boggs."

"He did, eh—yes, yes. And now, how do you suppose them bars came down?"

"Bars," repeated the man, somewhat startled, "are the bars down again?"

"They are down now."

"Well, I'm glad on't. Mr. Boggs said he'd fix 'em yesterday. They only wanted some pins in them. I asked him yesterday morning if I should fix 'em, and he said no. He said I might go to work, and he'd attend to that. Now, the cows are all gone."

"Ah, I understand," said Mr. Rolf. And as he spoke, he turned away and followed the track of his horse to the road, and he saw that it turned towards home. He knew the nature of his horse, and he was sure he should find him in his own stall. So he returned to the barn, and having taken the bridle on his arm, and thrown the light saddle over his shoulders, said to the hired man:

"You can tell Mr. Boggs that I have gone after my horse."

"But shan't I go with ye, sir?"

"No. I know just where I shall find him."

So Aaron Rolf went away all "saddled and bridled."

When Mr. Boggs came in to breakfast, he looked rather "blue."

"Why, what's the matter, John?" the wife asked eagerly, for her husband looked really sad.

He made no answer; and Matilda was upon the point of asking him again, when one of the rosy-cheeked little girls came running in with eagerness upon every round feature.

"O mamma!" she cried, "don't you think Mr. Rolf's horse has run off! He broke out of the stall where the halter-hole was clean worn off to 'en' almost nothing, and he ran out through the barn-door wall was all tumbled down! and he got through the bars where the cows hooked 'em down! and don't you think, he's gone off to try to catch him! He went with the saddle on his back! My sakes, ain't it too bad?"

Matilda Boggs looked at John Boggs a full minute, and then went on with her breakfast. She spoke not a word further on the subject.

The next forenoon there was a letter left at the house of John Boggs. That individual received it from his wife when he came to dinner. He had been fixing up a door, and some bars, &c. He open the letter and read as follows:

"OAK HILL, Sept. 23, 18—,

MR. JOHN BOGGS:—Dear Sir—

You may consider that all business relations between us are at an end. But I will not thus abruptly break off our plans without giving my reason. It is this. I am by nature very nervous, and I could not intrust my business in the hands of a man who cannot take care of his own. Were I not assured that the accident of last night was the result of what has become a confirmed habit with you, I might hesitate; but I understand it all. This will remain a secret with me; and trusting that we may remain friends, and that you may overcome an evil that cannot but result in harm to you, if followed up. I remain yours, &c.,

AARON ROLF."

John Boggs read this letter and rushed from the house. Matilda picked it up and read it. A cloud passed over her face, and then a ray of sunshine came. In a few moments she looked happy and contented.

But the dinner was getting cold, and she sent one of the children after him. He came in, looking sad and dejected. His wife went up to him and placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"John," she said kindly, "can not you buy some oxen?"

"Yes," he returned, moodily.

"And can you not buy them and still have much of the money left which you received for those you sold?"

"Yes."

"Then go and buy oxen, and hire your men, and do that work yourself. I'll do all I can towards taking care of your hands, and I am sure you will make much more than you would to have a partner. Come, we can do our duty without the help of any man who does not want to assist you."

John Boggs was dumb with grateful emotion. He knew how noble she was, and he now realized that if he had only given heed to her advice before he might have spared much of his shame. But he soon gazed up, and his only answer was to draw the faithful woman down and kiss her.

That afternoon he commenced upon the rule of life from which he resolved not to deviate. He posted off at once and before night he was the owner of eight yoke of oxen. They were not such beauties as those he had sold, but they were stout working oxen. Next he engaged his men. And when the season for work commenced, he went at it with a will.

The logs were all out and deposited in the river, and he was the clear, net gainer of one thousand dollars by the operation. But that was not all he gained from that fallen barn door. He gained the life lesson he so much needed; and from the rule it gave him he never after deviated. He never again saw a thing upon his place that needed attention without bestowing that attention at once. And the