

THE NEGLECTED WIFE.*

BY E. L. C.

WARR Evelyn, on the preceding evening, made his furtive retreat from Cecilia's apartment. He was in a state of mind far from enviable. He had been deeply touched, to meet, in return for his coldness and neglect, such tender and endearing love, such fond trust—and words of gentle soothing, where he expected only censure and upbraiding. His conscience was awakened to remorse, by the tears of anguish which fell from her eyes, upon his throbbing temples—by her sad entreating smiles—her tender and earnest words, which pierced like the points of naked daggers to his guilty heart. Then was the propitious moment to have avowed all his past errors, and to have atoned to her, whom he had so grieved and wronged, by turning from his devious course, to devote himself henceforth to her, and with her, to the fulfilment of those high and noble purposes, for which our Creator has bestowed upon us life.

But, though Evelyn was the creature of impulse and of passion, he shrunk, even in a moment of self-accusation and penitence, from laying bare his polluted heart to the pure gaze of Cecilia—he was destitute of moral courage, and he wanted that elevation of mind and of principle, which would have given him a juster view of her character, the singular beauty and loveliness of which, he knew not how to appreciate. Yet, had he now repaid, as he should have done, with unreserved confidence, her trusting love, how, even guilty as he was, would she have opened her whole heart to welcome him to its embrace—and, from the midst of temptations and perils, how gently would she have lured him back to the path of virtue—and led him, by the sweet accents of affection, the holy influence of example, onward and upward, to the great source of true and eternal happiness—from whom flows the highest bliss of earth, and the indestructible and purer joys of heaven. Had he done this, what evils might not have been spared to both. Instead of which, in the weakness of a vain and foolish pride, he stifled the voice of conscience and of virtue that cried aloud within him, and turned, with wanton folly, from the peace, the happiness, with which one fond and loving heart yearned to bless and brighten his existence.

An hour of stormy self-conflict Evelyn passed alone and in silence after leaving Cecilia, and then, with secret resolutions, that threw a gleam of

hope upon the future, and might have cheered and blessed it, had they endured even beyond the temptations of that night,—he left his house, and walked slowly towards the residence of Mrs. Sinclair.

He found her awaiting him in a small apartment, crowded with the tasteful and costly *bijouterie* of distant lands, and beguiling the time, till his arrival, with her guitar, which she accompanied with her sweet and powerful voice, the rich strains of which had so often entranced the senses of Evelyn; that as in approaching the room they now fell upon his ear, he almost dreaded their effect upon his vacillating and passionate heart. Mrs. Sinclair was alone, unless a creole, of exquisite beauty, who was always in attendance upon her mistress, and who now sat at her feet, might be termed a second person. But she was a mere child as yet, and her presence was therefore permitted on all occasions, though, for the girl's sake, it might perhaps have been as well had it been sometimes dispensed with. An astral lamp shed its soft moonlight rays through the apartment, yet scarcely served to reveal to a cursory glance the figure of its fair mistress, which was partially hid by the rose-hued draperies of the window, near which she sat, and from which, as they fell gracefully around her, her glowing cheek, and ripe lip, seemed to steal a hue of even added brilliancy. Flowers, in lavish profusion, every where met the eye; but their delicate fragrance was lost in the more powerful perfume of the burning pastilles that evolved light wreaths of odorous smoke through the apertures of a small silver censer, which the creole, Zilla, swung idly to and fro, as she reclined at the feet of her beautiful mistress, till the atmosphere of the room was loaded with the almost overpowering vapour.

Mrs. Sinclair held forth her hand, with one of her most bewitching smiles, to greet Evelyn as he entered; but the remembrance of Cecilia's fond and fearful eyes, and of his own better resolves, steeled him for the moment against her enchantments, and gave unwonted coldness to his manner, as he returned her salutation, and then, contrary to his usual custom, threw himself carelessly upon a distant seat, instead of occupying one on the couch beside her. She marked his disturbance; but, aware that it was not a moment

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