

The Wife.

BY JOHN G. WHITTIER.

She was a beautiful girl when I first saw her. She was standing up at the side of her lover at the marriage altar. She was slightly pale—yet ever and anon, and the ceremony proceeded a faint tinge of crimson crossed her beautiful cheek, like the reflections of a sunset cloud upon the clear waters of a quiet lake. Her lover, as he clasped her hand within his own, gazed on her a few minutes with unmingled admiration, and warm and eloquent blood shadowed at intervals his manly forehead and melted in beauty on his lips.

And they gave themselves to one another in the presence of Heaven, and every heart blessed them, as they went their way rejoicing in their love.

Years passed on and I again saw those lovers. They were seated together where the light of sun-set stole through half closed crimson curtains, lending a richer tint to the delicate carpeting and the exquisite embellishment of the rich and gorgeous apartment. Time had slightly changed them in outward appearance. The girlish buoyancy of the one had given place to the grace of perfect womanhood, and her lips were somewhat paler and a faint line of care was slightly perceptible upon her brow. Her husband's brow, too, was marked somewhat more deeply than his age might warrant; anxiety, and ambition, and pride had grown over it and left the trace upon it; a silver hue was mingled with the dark in his hair, which had become thin around his temples, almost in baldness. He was reclining on his splendid ottoman with his face half hidden by his hand, as if he feared that the deep and troubled thoughts which oppressed him were visible upon his features.

'Edward, you are not ill to night,' said his wife, in a low, sweet, half inquiring voice, as she laid his hand upon her own.

Indifference from those we love is terrible to the sensitive bosom. It is as if the sun of Heaven refused its wonted cheerfulness, and glared upon us with a cold, dim and forbidden glance. It is dreadful to feel that the only being of our love refuses to ask our

sympathy—that he broods over the feelings which he scorns or fears to reveal. The wife essayed once more.

'Edward,' she said slowly, mildly, and affectionately, 'the time has been when you were willing to confide your secret joys and sorrows to one who had never, I trust, betrayed your confidence! Why, then, my dear Edward, is this cruel reserve? You are troubled, and yet you refuse to tell me the cause.'

Something of returning tenderness softened for an instant, the cold severity of the husband's features, but it passed away; a bitter smile was the only reply.

Time passed on and the twain were separated from each other. The husband sat gloomy and alone in the damp cell of a dungeon. He had followed ambition as a god, and had fallen in a high career. He had mingled with men whom his heart had loathed, he had sought out the fierce and wronged spirits of the land, and had breathed into them the madness of revenge. He had drawn his sword against his country; he had fanned rebellion to a flame, and it had been quenched in human blood. He had fallen, and was doomed to die the death of a traitor.

The door of the dungeon opened and a light form entered and threw herself into his arms. The softest light of summer fell upon the pale brow and wasted cheek of his once beautiful wife.

'Edward, my dear Edward, she said, 'I have come to save you; I have reached you after a thousand difficulties, and I thank God, my purpose is nearly executed.'

Misfortune has softened the proud heart of manhood, and as the husband pressed his pale wife to his bosom, a tear trembled on his eyelid.

'I have not deserved this kindness,' he murmured in the choking tone of agony.

'Edward,' said his wife, in an earnest but faint and low voice, which indicated extreme and fearful debility, 'we have not a moment to lose. By an exchange of garments you will be enabled to pass unnoticed. Haste or we may be too late. Fear nothing for me. I am a woman, and they will not injure my efforts in behalf of a husband dearer than life itself.'

'But Margaret,' said the husband, 'you