

## JOHN BOSTWICK'S BATTLE.

Among the many snug homes in the midland counties of England there are few more attractive than that of John Bostwick. He and his wife had been married ten years, and four children had blessed their union, which was a genuine love match. They had lived happily together, and only once had their sky been clouded. That was when little Mary, a bright, pretty girl of six, had died in her mother's arms and was buried in a grassy corner of the parish churchyard. But both father and mother were young, the other children seemed to cuddle still closer to their parents' hearts, and smiles finally came back where tears had been, as sunshine follows a shower. Yet not at once, for Mary had been her father's pet, although he could not be said to have neglected the others for her sake. For John was a domestic man, and when the day's business was done, he was sure to go straight home, his mind full of pleasant fancies about the greetings that awaited him there.

Matters went on in this way for, perhaps, a year after the death of little Mary; when the husband and father began to look and act unlike his old self. It was not drink or bad company—his wife well knew that—for no man in broad England had better principles or steadier habits than John Bostwick. At first she noticed that his step was slower than it used to be; that his face looked anxious and drawn, and he appeared to enjoy his meals less than formerly. Once he had been lavish of his compliments on the dishes she prepared; now he no longer praised her skill as a cook. Occasionally he would speak rather peevishly of the cares and vexations of his business, yet she had often heard him express a wish that he had more to do, so strong and vigorous did he feel and so elastic were his spirits. The fond wife knew enough of her husband's affairs, however, to be certain that he was already

planning and toiling beyond his strength. This labor, with his half-hidden grief over the loss of little Mary, was bringing trouble, but in what form she could not tell.

Mrs. Bostwick had not noticed this change without speaking of it to him and urging him to tell her just how he felt, and, if necessary, to consult a medical man. But he had invariably answered, "Oh, Susie, don't worry. I haven't felt very well, lately, but it's nothing serious. You shouldn't notice it. I'll be all right, soon. Perhaps I've worked a trifle too hard this summer. I don't need a doctor nor any medicine. You would have me real ailing if I let you do as you like."

Speaking in such words as these John would quiet his wife for the moment, but he did not convince her.

One night late in September he entered the house earlier than usual and sank into the arm-chair before the fire. The children gathered around his knees and began their prattle of the day's events in their small lives; and to ply him with questions as to what he had seen and done since that distant period in a child's estimate—the morning. Making short replies or none at all, he pushed them gently away, bent his head upon his hand, and remained perfectly silent. Entering the room from another part of the house, and surprised to see her husband home so early, Susan walked softly to his side, pressed a welcoming kiss upon his forehead, but with the wise instinct of women, made no remark. Dinner was presently on the table; the food was plentiful and good, yet it was a dull and cheerless meal, for "Papa," contrary to his habit, ate little and said less.

Seeing that her husband was really ill Susan persuaded him to retire to bed. Yet he could not sleep. He was sick at the stomach and very feverish. His breath was short and quick, and his hands and feet cold.

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