

A STORY FOR WIVES.

BY T. B. ARTHUR.

"Come round to Guy's, to-night, Ned," said a young acquaintance to Edward Nichols, as they stood exchanging a few words at the corner of a street, where they had paused for a moment or two ere taking their different ways homeward.

"What's to be done there?" inquired Nichols. "Nothing very particular, but do you come round, and I'll promise you a pleasant evening."

"I believe I'll stay at home with my wife," replied Nichols.

"Well, just as you like," said the other. "Happy to see you at Guy's; but if you find it more agreeable at home, stay there. Should the time, however, from any cause, hang heavy on your hands, just drop round and help us to spend an hour or two. My word for it, you'll find more than one agreeable companion."

The young men parted, and Edward Nichols pursued his way homeward. The latter had been married about two years. On entering the room where his wife was sitting, Nichols saw with a feeling of disappointment, that there was then a cloud upon her brow. The cloud had appeared so often, that he was getting discouraged.

"Is anything wrong, Margaret," he asked kindly.

"No," was the brief reply, uttered in a complaining tone of voice.

Nichols sighed, and turning to the crib in which their babe lay sleeping, bent over it, and looked down upon its pure sweet face.

"Don't wake that child, Edward," said his wife, in a fretful voice, "I've been more than an hour trying to get her asleep."

Nichols stood a moment or two, still gazing upon the tranquil face of the child, and then raised himself from his stooping posture, fixing his eyes as he did so, upon the countenance of his wife. There was not an expression in it that a man could love. A peevish, unhappy temper, had, for a time, absorbed every attraction. The husband felt repulsed. Leaving the room without a remark, he went down to the parlor, and taking a book, sat and read until tea was announced.

There was no pleasant light in the face of Mrs. Nichols as she joined her husband at the table.

"Don't you feel well, Margaret?" he asked.

"My head aches," was returned.

"I'm sorry, what has caused —"

"Dish water!" ejaculated Mrs. Nichols, interrupting what her husband was about to say, and setting down the tea-pot she had lifted, with a jar upon the tray. "Such tea!" she added as she took off the lid and looked within the tea-pot. Then she rung the table-bell, and the cook made her appearance.

"Have'n't I told you over and over Jane, not to fill up the tea-pot in this way? You've made tea enough for a dozen people, but it's weak as dish-water. Here! pour it out and draw fresh tea, and don't fill the pot more than a quarter full."

Jane looked vexed at this sharp rebuke; but removed the tea.

Mrs. Nichols gave vent to a number of angry re-

marks about the trouble she had to get anything done right, and very aimably expressed the wish that her husband had the trial of housekeeping for a short time. He would, in that case, it was her opinion, have more sympathy with her.

Nichols was hurt at this gratuitous remark, but said nothing. He had no wish to make still heavier the clouds that came between him and the bright sunshine, and experience told him that such would be the effect of almost anything he might utter.

Five unhappy minutes passed before Jane came in with the newly-made tea. Not a word had been spoken for nearly the whole of this time. But Mrs. Nichols's pent-up feelings could restrain themselves no longer.

"It's too bad," she exclaimed, addressing the cook, "I'm out of all patience with such doings. Pray, see that my wishes are better attended to in future."

The girl muttered something as she retired, and then Nichols and his wife were alone again. Both ate in silence, but very sparingly. On rising from the table the wife went up to her chamber, while the husband took refuge in the parlor, and there sought to forget his uncomfortable sensation in the pages of an entertaining book. In this he was not successful. The pressure upon his feelings was too great. He loved his wife, and would have done almost anything to make her happy; but being of a cheerful temper himself and fond of social intercourse he could neither comprehend nor be indifferent to her fretful, moody, unhappy state. They pained him exceedingly, and, at times, awakened thoughts in his mind, the knowledge of which would have been to his wife a more real cause of pain than any from which she gathered so much unhappiness.

While trying to find in the book in which he was reading a pleasant recreation, Mr. Nichols remembered the invitation of his young friend Anderson to meet him and some pleasant companions and pass an hour at Guy's Tavern. His mind no longer took in the meaning of the sentences on the page before him. Soon after he closed the book, and, rising from his chair, walked for a short time about the room. There was a struggle in his mind between duty and inclination. He believed that it was his duty to remain at home with his wife, while inclination drew him strongly towards the friends at Guy's. Had his wife been in a pleasant mood; had she made home bright with the smile of affection, both duty and inclination would have been on the same side. But, alas! this was not so. At home there was a repellant sphere; while at a certain point away from home there existed a strong attraction.

At length Nichols went up stairs, with his mind made up to remain at home if he found his wife in a more cheerful and companionable state, or to spend the evening at Guy's, if no change for the better was visible. On entering his wife's chamber, he found her at her work-stand engaged in sewing. She did not look up, nor speak.

"Does your head feel any better, Margaret?" he asked, kindly.

"No," was the only response, made in a low constrained voice.

"It is not good for you to sew, if your head aches," resumed Mr. Nichols, still in a very kind voice.

But, to this no answer was given.

"I'm going out for a little while," said Mr. Nichols.

"Well," was the brief reply to this communication, and still she sewed on without once lifting her eyes from her work.

As Mr. Nichols was altogether in earnest, he now turned away and left the room. The moment he did so, his wife let her work fall upon her lap, and raising her head, listened in an attitude of much interest. She heard her husband descend the stairs, pause at the hat-stand for his coat and hat, and then move along the hall, and, finally, pass out through the street door. The moment the jar of the door was heard, she burst into tears and wept bitterly she did not again resume her work. For a while after her tears ceased to flow, she sat in a dreamy, reflective attitude.

"Ah me!" she at length sighed — "I wish I had more control over myself."

On leaving his house, Edward Nichols proceeded straight to Guy's Hotel. If there had been sunshine at home, there would have been no attraction for him abroad. If he could have found companionship in his wife, he would not have felt the least inclination for such a dangerous companionship as he was now seeking.

"Is Mr. Anderson here?" inquired Nichols of the bar-keep at Guy's.

"You'll find him at No. 8," was the answer. "He's on the second floor, at the far end of the passage."

To number eight Nichols repaired. As he approached the door, loud and merry voices were heard within. He did not hesitate to enter, for the voice of Anderson was distinguished among the rest.

"Nichols!" exclaimed the individual just mentioned, coming forward, and grasping the hand of the new comer, "I thought you'd be late. Right glad am I to see you!"

Quite as warm was the welcome extended by three other young men, all of whom were acquaintances of Nichols. They were sitting round a table on which were brandy and cigars.

"Help yourself," said Anderson, placing a decanter and tumbler before Nichols.

The latter did not hesitate about complying with this request, but poured out a stiff glass of brandy and drank it off.

"Take a cigar," was the next invitation.

The cigar was accepted and lit. Nichols began to feel himself more and more at home every moment.

"What's the business on hand?" he inquired, after he had commenced smoking.

"To enjoy ourselves," was replied.

At this moment a servant entered with a number of dishes on a tray, and commenced laying the table.

"Ah! some eating to be done, I see," remarked Nichols.