

## A STORY FOR WIVES.

BY T. S. ARTHUR.

(Continued from last issue—Conclusion.)

Oh! what a wretched night was that for Mrs. Nichols. Wretched beyond conception. With great difficulty she succeeded in removing her husband's clothes, and getting him covered up in bed. Then, unable to sleep, she passed the greater part of the time till morning in weeping or self-reproaches.

There had existed for Mrs. Nichols no real cause for unhappiness out of herself. Her husband, though not wealthy, was in good circumstances, and supplied every reasonable want she could desire. He was, moreover, a kind, cheerful, even-tempered man, domestic in his habits and feelings, and rather more disposed to seek intellectual, than sensual pleasures. Of social intercourse he was fond. With such a husband, it would seem that almost any woman could be happy; and Mrs. Nichols was happy in her way. She loved and respected her husband, but unfortunately for both her peace of mind and his was naturally of a fretful temper, which by long indulgence had grown into a disease; moreover, she had not the best of health; but indifferent health was most dependent on mental causes. It required only a little thing to disturb the even current of her feelings; and when this current was once disturbed it took some time for it to run clear.

Hardly any thing could have been more unbecoming to Mr. Nichols than the April-day life he had led since his marriage. He had no confidence in the smile of the morning, for too often the brightest smiles were drowned in tears at his evening return. Thus it had been going on for two years, and Mr. Nichols was getting discouraged. Instead of gaining self-control, his wife seemed to be losing the little portion she had possessed at the time of their marriage. The consequences growing out of one of her periodical fits of despondency and ill-humour we have just described.

Ever this, although her husband never complained, Mrs. Nichols had often felt that it was wrong to give way so much to her feelings; and she had often tried to force back the unhappy spirits that came intruding themselves into her mind. But it was hard to break a long continued habit. Her resistance was feeble, and the barriers she sought to interpose, quickly swept away.

The rebuking words of her husband, uttered in his drunken, unreflective state dragged the veil from before her eyes, and gave her to see the true relation she bore to him, and how she had been gradually alienating him from herself and home. And the dreadful consequences of that alienation! How the thought made her shudder.

It is no wonder that Mrs. Nichols had no inclination for sleep, nor that she spent most of the hours of that dreadful night in tears.

It was long past daylight when Mr. Nichols awoke. The sun was shining brightly into the room from the open curtains; but all was silent. He raised himself up and looked around. On a sofa lay his wife asleep. Tears were glistening on her pale

cheeks. His head ached, and his mind was confused. Some moments elapsed before he was able to comprehend the meaning of what he saw and felt. Gradually then, the memory of his evening's debauch grew distinct, and there was a faint recollection of what he had said to his wife coming home.

With a deep sigh the unhappy man threw himself back on his pillow; that sigh penetrated the ears of his wife, and she started up with an answering sigh. Nichols perceived this, and let his lids fall—feigning slumber. He said nothing; but he heard his wife approaching—he felt her breath upon his forehead, as she bent over him. What was that upon his cheek the sudden touch of which sent a thrill along his nerves? It was a tear! A stifled sigh was now heard. And then his wife moved from the bedside.

Oh! how wretched they both were. Oh, how intensely did both shrink from the moment when they should look into each other's conscious faces! Shame, deep shame and mortification were in the heart of one; and self-reproaches and fear in the heart of the other.

For full half an hour did Nichols continue to feign sleep. He could not make up his mind to meet his wife after the debauch he had indulged in on the previous night, and for which he now heartily despised himself.

"Ah!" he sighed, as he lay musing over the unhappy aspect of affairs; "if Margaret would only control herself a little more. If she would only make home the pleasant place it should be, nothing could tempt me abroad into such companionship."

At length, as he lay with such thoughts filling his mind a sigh moved his lips, and forgetting that he was acting a part, his eyes unclosed. Mrs. Nichols was standing near, looking upon his face.

"Are you not well, Edward?" she asked, stepping to the bedside quickly and laying her hand gently upon his forehead. Her voice was low, earnest and tender.

"Not very well, dear," returned Nichols in a subdued manner, his lids falling upon his cheeks as he spoke.

Mrs. Nichols pressed her lips to his forehead, and then laid her face, now wet with tears, against his.

Thus the matter was reconciled between them, and never after was the remotest allusion thereto. Days passed before the pressure on both their feelings was sufficiently removed to permit their hearts to bound lightly; yet during the time, they were particularly kind towards and considerate of each other.

In due time the sunshine came back again, and it was a more permanent sunshine. Stronger reasons for self-control were seen to exist by Mrs. Nichols, than were before apparent to her mind, and she called into exercise a strength of purpose that made her effort successful. Was she not herself happier, independent of the effect upon her husband? Yes, far happier. The fretful spirits were cast out of her mind, and cheerful spirits came in to fill their places. A new habit of feeling was established.

"Why Nichols!" said the young man named Anderson, meeting him about two months afterwards,

"where do you keep yourself these pleasant evenings?"

"At home," returned Nichols.

"Come round and join us in a supper at Guy's to-morrow night, Marsden's to be one of the company."

Nichols shook his head and said "No," in a very unequivocal manner.

"Didn't get a certain lecture last time, I hope," said Anderson, with rude familiarity. "Shouldn't wonder, for you went home a little high."

"If I had received one, it would have been no more than I deserved," replied Nichols, a little coldly.

"Oh, no offense," said Anderson, seeing that his familiarity was not well received, "I only spoke in jest. But come round to-morrow night. As I mentioned, Marsden will be there; and you know he is all sorts of a fine fellow."

"Marsden had better stay at home with his family as I shall do," returned Nichols.

"I rather think he finds almost any place more agreeable than home," replied Anderson.

"Why so?"

"They say his wife is as peevish and fretful as a person can well be. A woman who is ever grumbling and whom nobody can please for an hour together."

"That's speaking rather broadly."

"I know. But the plain truth is, as far as I can learn, that she doesn't make home attractive for her husband, and so he goes abroad for better companionship."

"It's a pity," Mr. Nichols responded, then adding a "good-lay" he parted from his pleasure-loving young friend, and kept on his way homeward where the sunshine had come back again.

Does our little story need a word to enforce the lesson to wives that we would teach? Men, especially those who are cheerful and companionable, have many temptations to go abroad and mingle with the pleasure-seeking. Let wives who have good home-loving temperate husbands, remember this, and let them not fail to repress a peevish, fretful, fault-finding temper, if inclined thereto, for nothing will estrange a man from home as this. There are hundreds of men who go abroad to spend their evenings in taverns and at political meetings, who would never think of leaving their homes and going out after nightfall, if a cheerful fire blazed on their own hearth-stone.

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