

THE SHADOWS WE CAST.

A child was playing with some miniature building materials, and as the mimic castle rose before his eyes in graceful proportion, a new pleasure swelled in his heart; he felt himself to be the creator of a "thing of beauty," and was conscious of a new born power. Arch, wall, buttress, gateway, drawbridge, lofty tower, and battlement, were all the work of his hands. He was in wonder at his own skill in thus creating from an unseemingly lot of toy materials, a structure of such rare design.

Silently he stood and gazed upon his castle, with something of the pride of an architect who sees, after months or years of skillfully applied labor, some grand conception in his art embodied in imperishable stone. It did not seem to him a toy, reaching only a few inches in height, and covering but a square foot of ground, but a real castle, lifting itself hundreds of feet upward toward the blue sky, and spreading wide upon the earth its ample foundations.

As the idea grew more and more perfect, the child's strange pleasure increased. Now he stood with folded arms, wrapped in the over-mastering illusion—now walked slowly around, viewing the structure on all sides, and noting every minute particular—and now sat down, and bent over it with the fondness of a mother bending over her child. Again he arose, and purposing to obtain another and more distant view of his work; but his foot struck against one of the buttresses, and instantly, with a crash, wall, tower, and battlement fell in hopeless ruin!

In the room with the boy, sat his father reading. The crash disturbed him, and he uttered a sharp, angry rebuke, glancing for a moment toward the startled child, and then turning his eyes to the attractive page before him, unconscious of the shadow he had cast upon the heart of the child. Tears came into those fair blue orbs, dancing in light a moment before. From the frowning face of his father, to which his glance was suddenly turned, the child looked back to the shapeless ruins of his castle. Is it any wonder that he bowed his face in silence upon them, and wetted them with tears?

For more than five minutes he sat as still as if sleeping; then, in a mournful kind of way, yet almost noiselessly he commenced restoring the box, from whence he had taken the many shaped pieces that, play-joined together, had grown into a noble building. After the box was filled

he replaced the cover, and laid it carefully upon a shelf in the closet.

Poor child! that shadow was a deep one, and long in passing away. His mother found him, half an hour afterwards, asleep on the floor, with cheeks flushed to an unusual brightness. She knew nothing of that troubled passage in his young life; and the father had forgotten, in the attraction of the book he was reading, the momentary annoyance expressed in words and tones with a power in them to shadow the heart of his child.

A young wife had busied herself for many days in preparing a pleasant surprise for her husband. The work was finished at last, and now she awaited his return with a heart full of warm emotions. A dressing gown and a pair of elegantly embroidered slippers, wrought by her own skillful fingers, were the gifts by which she meant to delight him. What a troop of pleasant fancies was in her heart!—How, almost impatiently, did she wait for the coming twilight, which was to be dawn, not approaching darkness to her.—At last she heard the step of her husband on the passage, and her pulse leaped with fluttering delight. Like a bird upon the wing, she flew down to meet him, impatient for the kiss that awaited her.

To men in the world of business, few days pass without their disappointments and perplexities. It is man's business to bear this in a manly spirit. They form but a portion of life's discipline, and should make them stronger, braver, and more enduring. Unwisely, and we may say, unjustly, too many men fail to leave their work shops or counting houses at the day's decline. They wrap them in bundles and carry them home to shadow their households. It was so with the young husband on this particular occasion. The stream of business had taken an eddying whirl, and thrown his vessel backward instead of onward, for a brief space; and though it was still in the current and sliding safely onward again, the jar and disappointment had fretted his mind severely. There was no heart warmth in the kisses he gave his wife, not because his love for her had failed in any degree, but because he had let care overshadow love. He drew his arms around her, but she was conscious of a diminished pressure in that embracing arm.

"Are you not well?" she inquired.

With what tender concern was the question asked!

"Very well," he replied.

He might be in body but not in mind, that was plain—for his voice was far from being cheerful.

She played and sang his favorite pieces, hoping to restore, by the charms of music, brightness to his spirit. But she was conscious of partial success. There was still a gravity in his manner never perceived before. At tea time she smiled upon him so sweetly across the table, and talked to him on such attractive themes, that the bright expression returned to his countenance, and he looked as happy as she could desire.

From the tea table they returned to their pleasant parlor. And now the time had come for offering her gift and receiving the coveted reward of glad surprise, followed by sweet kisses and loving words. Was she selfish! Did she think more of her reward than of the pleasure she would bestow? But this is questioning too closely.

"I will be back in a moment," she said, and, passing from the room, she went lightly up stairs. Both tone and manner betrayed the secret, or rather the possession of a secret with which her husband was to be surprised. Scarcely had her loving face faded from before his eyes, when the thought returned with a single bound, to an unpleasant event of the day; and the waters of his spirit were again troubled. He had actually arisen and crossed the floor twice, moved by a restless concern, when his wife came back with the dressing gown and slippers. She was trying to force her countenance into a quiet expression, to hold back the smiles that were continually striving to break in truant circles around her lips, when a single glance at her husband's face told her that the spirit driven away by the exercise of her love had returned again to his bosom. He looked at her soberly as she came forward.

"What are these?" he asked, almost coldly, repressing surprise, and affecting an ignorance that he did not feel in regard to the beautiful present she held in her hands.

"They are for you, dear," was the reply; "I made them."

"For me!" he exclaimed. "Nonsense! What do I want with such jimerackery? This is woman's wear. Do you think I would disfigure my feet with embroidered slippers, or dress up in that gown? Put them away, dear. Your husband is too much of a man to robe himself in gay colors, like a clown or an actor." And he waved his hand with an air of contempt.