

Literature.

THE WIFE.

BY AGNES PIERSOL.

It was the dead hour of the night. The room was a high wainscotted apartment, with furniture of a rich but antique pattern. The pale moonlight streaming through a curtained window, and struggling with the subdued light of a candle placed in a corner, disclosed the figure of a sick man extended on a bed, wrapped in an unquiet slumber. By his side sat a care-worn, though still beautiful woman, gazing anxiously on his face, and breathlessly awaiting the crisis of the fever, for it was now the ninth day since that strong man had been prostrated by the hand of disease, and during all that time he had raved in an incessant delirium. He had at length dropped into an unquiet slumber, broken at first by starts and moans, but during the last hour he had been less restless, and he now lay as still as a sculptured statue. His wife well knew that ere morning the crisis would be past, and she waited, with a woman's affection, breathlessly for the event.

Few girls had been more admired than Emily Severn. But it was not only the beauty of her features and the elegance of her form which drew around her a train of admirers: her mind was one of no ordinary cast, and the sweetness of her temper lent an ineffable charm to all she did. It was long before she loved. She was not to be misled by glitter or show. She could only bestow her affections where she thought they were deserved, and it was not until she met Edward Walpole that she learned to surrender her heart.

Edward Walpole, when he became the husband of Emily Severn, was apparently all that a woman could wish. He was warm-hearted, of a noble soul, kind, gentle, and ever ready to waive his own selfish gratifications at the call of duty.—But alas! he had one weakness *he did not act from principle.* His generous deeds were the offspring of a warm heart, rather than of a regulated intellect. As yet he had never been placed in circumstances which severely tried his principles.

But about a year after his marriage, he fell heir to the large property of an aunt, and at

once his whole style of life was altered. His accession of wealth brought him into contact with society in which hitherto he had never mingled, he condemned himself to comparative idleness. He now began to be tortured by *ennui* and sought excitement to pass away the time. The harpies who infest society, and with the appearance of gentlemen have the hearts of fiends, marked him for their prey, and his open and generous nature made him their victims in a comparatively short space of time. We shall not trace his downward progress. It is always a melancholy task to mark the lapse from virtue of a noble and generous character, and how much more so when the heart of a wife is to be broken by the dereliction from rectitude.

Emily saw the gradual aberration of her husband, and through she mourned the cause, no word of reproach escaped her lips, but by every gentle means she strove to bring back her husband to the paths of virtue. But a fatality seemed to have seized him. He was in a whirlpool. He still loved his wife, and more than once, when her looks cut him to the heart, he made an effort to break loose from his associates; but they always found means to bring him back ere long. Thus a year passed. His fortune began to give way, for he had learnt to gamble. As his losses became more frequent, his thirst for cards became greater, until at length he grew sullen and desperate. He was now a changed man. He no longer felt compunction at the wrongs he inflicted on his sweet wife, but if her sad looks touched his heart at all, they only stung him into undeserved reproaches. He was become harsh and violent. Yet his poor wife endured all in silence. No recrimination passed her lips. But in the solitude of her chamber she shed many a bitter tear, and often at the hour of midnight, when her husband was far away in some riotous company, her prayers were heard ascending for him.

Two years had now elapsed, and the last one had been a year of bitter sorrow to Emily. At length her husband came home one night an almost ruined man. He had been stripped at the gambling table of every cent of his property, over which he had any control, and he was now in a state almost approaching to madness. Before morning he was in a high