



FOR THE CANADIAN QUEEN.

## THE CONSTANCY OF LOVE.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY J. A. WILKINSON, AUTHOR OF "A REAL ROBINSON CRUSOE," ETC.



It was Christmas Eve. The snug rectory of Calcroft lay beneath a mantle of crisp snow that cracked under the tread of the pedestrian. Lights shone dimly in the windows of the library, and brightly in those of the parlor. The other windows were in darkness. At one of the windows, in the shadow of the heavy curtains, sat a lady of proud, yet gentle bearing, dressed in widow's weeds. Her forehead was pressed against the cold glass, as if to cool the fever within. Her eyes were steadfastly fixed upon the walk leading

from the street, as if in earnest expectation. The shadows of the church spire and pinnacles fell across the lawn like tall spectres, as the moon struggled through the rifts in the clouds.

"Why does he not come? Oh, the hours seem so long!"

A silence followed these words which were more a prolonged sigh than an attempt at articulation.

"The train must be late, or perhaps he has missed it. What shall I do if he does not arrive to-night? Oh, dear, there is the clock striking seven."

"Excuse me," ma'am, said a girl opening the door, "but supper is ready; will you have it served now?"

"No, Mary, we will wait until Master Roland comes, but be sure and keep it warm."

Again that feverish brow rests against the window pane, and those expectant eyes scan the path between the door and the gate.

The click of the gate latch sounded on the frosty air. A form with rapid steps moved up the path, and soon the bell was heard. Too eager to wait for a formal entry, the watcher flew to the hall and threw open the door. A pair of strong arms encircled her, and kisses fell upon quivering lips.

"Come and sit by me, Roland, while Mary brings in the supper. I have waited, oh, so eagerly, for your return; the suspense has made me most miserable, and now that you are here, I am so glad!"

"Roland, you are growing to be a grand looking man. There is not a mother in the country, but would be proud of you; but the supper is ready, and I must not forget that you are hungry; even my praises will not satisfy a hungry man. Let us go to the dining-room and when you have eaten, I will have a long talk with you in the library."

Roland Radcliffe was indeed hungry, and was only too glad to be led out by his mother to the little table spread for two. Hungry as he was, he could not fail to notice that his mother scarcely tasted her supper, and when he undertook to press her to eat, he observed a glistening tear on her drooping lashes. Roland remembered that it was Christmas Eve, and thought that sad memories were crowding into his beautiful mother's heart, which his kind attention only intensified, and so he ate on in silence. After supper they repaired to the library, and when Roland was seated in the great arm-chair that was his father's favorite, his mother took a seat beside him, and placing her arm on his chair, looked wistfully into his face.

"Roland my dear," said Mrs. Radcliffe, after having gazed sorrowfully into his face for some time, "you have come home for Christmas, when you should be met with glad greetings only, and I have nothing but sadness, trouble and heartbreakings to give you. I feel almost guilty, for, do as I may, I have not the means of bringing one ray of joy into your heart, unless the fact of meeting your unhappy mother can do so."