

The Northwest Review.

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NO 29

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THE NEGLECTED WIFE.

BY M. AGNES WHITE.

Written for the Baltimore Catholic Mirror.

Towards morning carriage after carriage began to roll away until the last one ceased to sound on the gravel walk. Then she heard the servants locking up and then the family retiring to their rooms. She could hear her husband, his mother and his sisters with their young friends, on the stair way laughing lightly; and then the good nights were repeated. Her husband's voice, too, was there, and she heard him speak in his deep tones to some one, and she knew it was the woman who had robbed her of her happiness. She did not believe, in her pure womanly heart, that she meant her ill; but the pain was just as great. She wondered if he would come to her—the man she had promised to love, honor and obey, and who, in turn, had vowed to protect and love her. Alas! how sadly he was keeping the sacred promise. Would he come and bid her good night? During the long evening he had not been near her, nor even during the day. Oh! but for one kind word to make the night bearable. He had told them all good-night, and was coming whistling to himself. He would surely stop. He, at least, was happy, and could well afford to make her so. But there was no pausing as he neared her room. He went hastily on to his own apartment, and she heard his door close. It was over now—the little moment of expectancy—and hope had died out. There was no cry from the pale lips, no tear from the sad eyes; but she lay as still and as motionless as if the angel of death had spread his wings over her.

The morning came, and as the early birds sing and the aurora, with her pink smile, rose in the east, the woman sat up and looked a round her. She had grown old in those moments of wretchedness. Her muslin dress was still on; she had never thought to remove it; she would do so now. She went to the mirror to take away the roses that had faded on her bosom. Could it be her own face that reflected itself in the glass? Impossible! She clasped her hands before it to shut out the vision. She must certainly try not to look like this, or she would frighten the household. She would dress herself in her morning robes and run down to the bay, walk along the beach, and watch the sails skim over the water. She had loved this recreation once; possible now she could enjoy it again. She must get over this misery. The circumstances might be the same during her whole life, and she must try and stand them, and not give away. Life she thanked God, would not always last and to take up the cross that was so heavy and carry it bravely would be the easiest way, after all.

The air was cool and bracing, and she started out into it, like a frightened bird, from under the eaves of the house, where her path was so full of thorns. The further on her footsteps carried her seemed to give more rest to her wounded, weary spirit. The atmosphere of the house seemed to stifle her in the last few days. As she neared the water her spirit slowly revived. New life and activity took possession of her limbs, that were only an hour ago trembling and weary. She was almost like a child in the feel-

ing of relief she experienced. For sometime she amused herself picking up shells and watching the sails go up and down the bay. At last her eyelids grew heavy, and, leaning her head against a tree, she slept. The passengers on the boats passing saw the sleeping figure upon the shore, and wondered who it could be; but unconscious of their surmise, she slumbered on, till the sun, high up in the heavens, awakened her. She knew it must be very, very late; and what would they think of her? Another cause of censure from her aristocratic mother-in-law, and a réproof of her husband. She quickened her steps and soon arrived home. She entered the hall. No one was present; and she drew off her hat and gloves, and seated herself upon the sofa. The long, refreshing sleep and the quick walk had heightened the colour in her cheeks, and her fair hair, slightly disheveled by the breeze, fell in a heavy mass over her shoulders. She was a fair picture to look upon, as she toyed with the blue ribbons of her hat and tied and untied the bows that trimmed it.

"Where were you this morning, Leonora?" She looked up half timidly at the speaker, who took a seat on the opposite sofa and cast a searching look at her daughter-in-law.

"I went down to the bay real early. The house felt so shut-up and warm, and I knew it would be a long time before any of you would be awake or breakfast would be ready. I hope that I have not kept any one waiting; have I?"

"Indeed I do not know whether any breakfast was saved for you or not. I suppose you can get something prepared for you, but you know how the servants here never want to be put out, and I find difficulty in keeping them. Russell, here is Leonora."

She heard his footsteps on the piazza, and his voice speaking to some one. He entered as his mother spoke with a frown on his handsome face. He advanced to where she sat and took a seat on the sofa, but not near her. Her heart beat quickly. She knew, by his face, that he was displeased with her, and she waited a little nervously for him to speak.

"Where have you been all morning?" he asked coldly.

She turned towards him her honest eyes looking him fully in the face, and answered:

"I went down to the bay, Russell I was tired of the house, and felt that I must go out. Was I wrong?"

"You must have felt the house lonely, and unbearable to have staid so long. In future you had better be more prudent and not to have every one searching for you all over the place."

"I did not know they would take the trouble to look for me," she said, with a shade of dreariness in her voice; "and then, too, I did not intend to stay so long, but—"

Here she paused, as if uncertain of what the disclosure may bring forth.

"Well," asked O'Donnell, seeing her hesitate, "what is it?"

"Why, I was so fatigued when I reached the bay that, after watching the sails of the vessels a time, I fell asleep."

There was a pitying expression in the husband's face as he looked at her. Just then, perhaps, the truth was drawing upon him that she was not happy, and, instead of reproving her, he thought she had done only what a tired child would do under the circumstances.

It may have been that he would have drawn nearer to her then, and linked their lives more closely together; but two circumstances, happening in and about that time, prevented it. As Russell O'Donnell entered the hall where his wife sat, the woman who had been his love watched him with jealous eyes. She had noticed in the morning that, when the alarm spread through the household that Leonora was nowhere to be found, her husband seemed restless and uneasy, and instantly began a search. She was not a bad woman, but still there was that evil feeling which smothered her better nature, and made her more of an enemy to herself than to the young, pure wife she was trying to injure; and now, as they sat together upon the sofa in the airy passage, she took in, almost

at a glance, the state of affairs. She came out from the sitting room, where she had been occupied with some light fancy work, and sat near the husband's mother on the opposite sofa. She was a very beautiful person, with the grace, ease and confidence of a truly society woman.

"I am glad," she said, "to see you safe at home, Mrs. O'Donnell," addressing Leonora. "I am sure you gave us all a great fright; I in fact thought you must be sick as you left the dance so early last night. Several persons asked for you, but I was unable to tell your whereabouts; and then your sudden disappearance this morning astonished us all. Where did you say you had your breakfast?" "My breakfast?" said Leonora. "Did I say that I had taken it anywhere? If I did, I surely did not know what I had been saying, as I have not taken it at all." "Have you not taken your breakfast? Why, where could you have been! Impossible. That you should have been alone all this time!"

A scarlet spot burned upon Leonora O'Donnell's cheek. What did this woman mean? She surely did not intend to insult her. She was certainly too much of a lady for that; so she would tell her the fact of her having fallen asleep, as she told her husband.

But how differently was it received. A significant look was in the questioner's eyes and a sneer on her lips; which did not escape O'Donnell, who turned to his wife. Leonora saw as well as himself the construction laid upon her words, and her crimson cheeks, at the woman's audacity, he construed into a different meaning. If Russell O'Donnell did not love his wife, at least he respected her for her purity and goodness. Now, if there was any reason to doubt her, he would, under the present state of things almost loath her.

Just at this moment the Major's pleasant voice was heard upon the piazza speaking to O'Donnell sisters. After he had left the dance the previous night Leonora's pale sad face had haunted him. He felt that he would give a great deal to spare her some of the bitterness with which he saw her cup was filled. So, on leaving home, he gathered her a bunch of flowers with the kindest and purest intention; now, both of the girls were begging him for the bouquet.

"No, I did not gather it for either of you," he was heard to say, laughingly.

"Then I know that it is for Mabel Stanley," said one of O'Donnell's sisters, feigning a pout. "I think it enough for all the other men in the country to be in love with Mabel; you should be an exception. Why, even Russell wishes that he was not married."

These words fell like an iron weight upon the young wife's heart. Her husband had heard, too, but she did not know how he felt—wishing, no doubt, that he was free. She sat still as the officer came in, while the other ladies rose to welcome him. O'Donnell also got up and saluted him, but he still held the flowers in his hand, and advanced to Leonora. He knew that she heard the careless words spoken by her sister-in-law, and his big heart pined her.

"I have brought those for you, Mrs. O'Donnell; will you have them!" taking a seat beside her and handing them to her.

The other ladies slightly started, whilst Leonora received them, saying: "How very kind of you; and they are so pretty."

"I am glad you like them; and they are very choice."

It had never occurred to her that any one could think ill of this gift, and there were so few who cared for her that she felt truly grateful for this consideration slight as it was; but, unfortunately, there were those present who did think ill of it; for when the Major left and Leonora had retired to her chamber, the following conversation proved it:

"So you allow Mrs. O'Donnell to receive bouquets from gentlemen, Russell?" asked the injured Mabel. "If I were a husband, I would not approve of such things."

"What would you have done, Mabel, if you had been Leonora. Would you have refused the flowers?" saying a word here in defence of his wife.

"I think I most assuredly would, What

do you say, Mr. O'Donnell. Did you think it right?"

"I do not see any criminal act in it," returned the lady, laughingly. "It is of ten done in society. But with Leonora it is different; she seems to care so little for admiration; and has not the slightest apparent desire for attention. Nevertheless, I think our friend and soldier has taken a wonderful liking to her in this short time."

O'Donnell arose and went out. He had married Leonora because he thought her good and pure. Was he to be disappointed, and was his cup of unhappiness to be filled to the brim. The outside world seemed so fond of her; why was it that his mother, sisters, and Mabel Stanley thought so little of her. Was it wrong in them to treat her so cruelly. Surely it must be. No wonder the poor thing sought some relief from the refined oppression she met with daily. If she were innocent, then it was a shame, if guilty—to this he would give no answer, but ran his hand feverishly across his brow, and we will leave him to his meditations.

II

Another month has passed away, and August has been ushered in. The weather is so sweet and delicious that every thing and every person want to be out in the pure, fresh air. It has not been a hot, scorching month, as August generally is, but so cool and balmy that it has been delightful to be out of doors, away from the shut-up close house. At the O'Donnell's everything is still and quiet. The clock on the bracket has rung out eleven long, clear strokes. Russell is in the library reading. He is all alone; but every now and then he listens as if for some footsteps. Can it be Leonora's. She, save the servants, is the only person in the house besides himself. Still, no sound comes, and he looks disappointed. Leonora is sitting in her own apartment, unconscious that any one wishes to see her, least of all her husband, who, from that fatal day when the major brought her the flowers, felt further from his heart than ever before. She felt so much alone lately. Mabel Stanley seemed to be ruling the house. hold; and to her she was always cool and indifferent; in fact, every one, during the last month, had treated her with so little kindness or consideration that her sensitive nature had almost withered, and she shrank with diffidence, because her retiring disposition felt chilled with the little consideration shown her.

A little white rabbit that had broken its leg came limping in to her, seeking for comfort. She had taken it in her arms, and hugged it to her breast. Though her own feelings were wounded fifty times a day, still, instead of making her bitter it had only increased her sympathy for every creature that suffered. Now the little animal crept closer to her and looked with its wide open eyes, into her pitying face.

"Poor thing," she said leaning over, and kissing its white head; "you are trembling like a leaf. I wish that I could cure you!"

"Leonora!" She looked up. Could it possibly be her own husband standing in the door looking at her. She arose from where she sat, and asked:

"Did you want anything?" "Yes," advancing, "you have the ammonia here, can you get it?"

"Your head aches. I'll get you the bottle, it is right here. Would you like for me to rub it, timidly."

"Well, yes, I believe I would. Can I lie here? I can't tell why my head aches this way. There, Leonora, rub it right there. That's it. I believe I feel better already, and can go to sleep."

"I wish you would," she said gently; "you would feel so much better if you could."

TO BE CONTINUED

Six hundred British emigrants arrived at Montreal this week en route to the west and Northwest. Amongst them were 34 young girls in charge of Rev. Mr. Wintec, of Liverpool, who will become domestic servants. Seventeen remain here and the balance will proceed to Winnipeg.