

## Literature, &amp;c.

## THE WIFE.

BY WASHINGTON IRVING.

I HAVE often had occasion to remark the fortitude which women sustain the most overwhelming reverses of fortune. Those disasters which break down the spirit of a man, and prostrate him in the dust, seem to call forth all the energies of the softer sex, and give such intrepidity and elevation to their character, that at times it approaches to sublimity. Nothing can be more touching, than to behold a soft and tender female, who had been all weakness and dependance, and alive to every trivial roughness, while reading the prosperous paths of life, suddenly rising in mental force to be the comforter and supporter of her husband under misfortune, and abiding, with unshrinking firmness the bitter blasts of adversity.

As the vine, which has long twined its graceful foliage about the oak, and been lifted by it into sunshine, will, when the hardy plant is rifted by the thunderbolt, cling round it with its caressing tendrils, and bind up its shattered boughs; so it is beautifully ordered by Providence, that woman, who is the mere dependant and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity; winding herself into the rugged recesses of his nature tenderly supporting the drooping head, and binding up the broken heart.

I was once congratulating a friend, who had around him a blooming family, knit together in the strongest affection, 'I can wish you no better lot,' said he, with enthusiasm, 'than to have a wife and children. If you are prosperous, there they are to share your prosperity; if otherwise, there they are to comfort you.' And indeed, I have observed that a married man falling into misfortune, is more apt to retrieve his situation in the world than a single one; partly, because he is more stimulated to exertion by the necessities of the helpless and beloved beings who depend on him for subsistence; but chiefly, because his spirits are soothed and relieved by domestic endearment, and his self-respect kept alive by finding, that though all abroad is darkness and humiliation, yet there is still a little world of love at home, of which he is the monarch. Whereas, a single man is apt to run to waste and self-neglect, to fancy himself lonely and abandoned, and his heart to fall to ruin, like some deserted mansion, for want of an inhabitant.

These observations call to mind a little domestic story, of which I was once a witness.—My intimate friend, Leslie, had married a beautiful and accomplished girl, who had been brought up in the midst of fashionable life. She had, it is true, no fortune, but that of my friend was ample; and he delighted in the anticipation of indulging her in every elegant pursuit, and administering to those delicate tastes and fancies that spread a kind of witchery about the sex.—'Her life,' said he, 'shall be like a fairy tale.'

The very difference in their characters produced a harmonious combination; he was of a romantic, and somewhat serious cast; she was all life and gladness. I have often noticed the mute rapture with which he would gaze upon her in company, of which her sprightly powers made her the delight; and how, in the midst of applause, her eye would still turn to him, as if there alone she sought favor and acceptance.—When leaning on his arm, her slender form contrasted finely with his tall manly person. The fond confiding air with which she looked up to him seemed to call forth a flush of triumphant pride and cherishing tenderness, as if he doated on his lovely burthen for its very helplessness. Never did a couple set forward on the flowery path of early and well suited marriage with a fairer prospect of felicity.

It was the misfortune of my friend, however, to have embarked his property in large speculations; and he had not been married many months, when, by a succession of sudden disasters it was swept from him, and he found himself reduced almost to penury. For a time he kept his situation to himself, and went about with a haggard countenance, and a breaking heart. His wife was but a protracted agony; and what rendered it more insupportable was the necessity of keeping up a smile in the presence of his wife; for he could not bring himself to overwhelm her with the news. She saw, however, with the quick eyes of affection that all was not well with him. She marked his altered looks and stifled sighs, and was not to be deceived by his sickly and vapid attempts at cheerfulness. She tasked all her sprightly powers and tender blandishments to win him

back to happiness; but she only drove the arrow deeper into his soul.—The more he saw cause to love her, the more torturing was the thought that he was soon to make her wretched. A little while, thought he, and the smile will vanish from that cheek—the song will die away from those lips—the lustre of those eyes will be quenched with sorrow—and the happy heart which now beats lightly in that bosom, will be weighed down, like mine, by the cares and miseries of the world.

At length he came to me one day, and related his whole situation in a tone of the deepest despair. When I had heard him through, I inquired, 'Does your wife know all these misfortunes?' At the question he burst into an agony of tears. 'For God's sake,' cried he, 'if you have any pity on me, don't mention my wife, it is the thought of her that almost drives me to madness.'

'And why not?' said I. 'She must know it sooner or later; you cannot keep it long from her, and the intelligence may break upon her in a more startling manner than if imparted by yourself; for the accents of those we love soften the harshest tidings. Besides, you are depriving yourself of the comforts of her sympathy; and not merely that, but also endangering the only bond that can keep hearts together—an unreserved community of thought and feeling. She will soon perceive that something is secretly preying upon your mind; and true love will not brook reserve: it feels undervalued and outraged, when even the sorrows of those it loves are concealed from it.'

'Oh, but my friend! to think what a blow I am to give to all her future prospects—how I am to strike her very soul to the earth, by telling her that her husband is a beggar!—that she is to forego all the elegancies of life—to shrink with me into indigence and obscurity! To tell her that I have dragged her down from the sphere in which she might have continued to move in constant brightness—the light of every eye—the admiration of every heart!—How can she bear poverty? She has been brought up in all the refinements of opulence. How can she bear neglect? She has been the idol of society. Oh, it will break her heart—it will break her heart!'

I saw his grief was eloquent, and I let it have its flow; for sorrow relieves itself by words.—When his paroxysm had subsided, and he had relapsed into moody silence I resumed the subject gently, and urged him to break his situation at once to his wife. He shook his head mournfully, but positively.

'But how are you to keep it from her, it is necessary she should know it, that you may take the steps proper to the alteration of your circumstances. You must change your style of living—nay, observing a pang to pass across his countenance, 'don't let that afflict you. I am sure you have never placed your happiness in outward show—you have yet friends, warm friends, who will not think the worse of you for being less splendidly lodged; and surely it does not require a palace to be happy with Mary—' I could be happy with her in a hovel!—I could go down with her into poverty and the dust!—I could—I could—God bless her!—God bless her!' cried he, bursting into a transport of grief and tenderness.

'And believe me, my friend,' said I, stepping up, and grasping him warmly by the hand, 'believe me, she can be the same with you. Ay, more; it will be a source of pride and triumph to her—it will call forth all the latent energies and fervent sympathies of her nature; for she will rejoice to prove that she loves you for yourself. There is in every true woman's heart a spark of heavenly fire, which lies dormant in the broad daylight of prosperity; but which kindles up, and beams and blazes in the dark hour of adversity. No man knows what a ministering angel she is—until he has gone with her through the fiery trials of this world.'

There was something in the earnestness of my manner, and figurative style of my language, that caught the excited imagination of Leslie. I knew the auditor I had to deal with, and following up the impression I had made, I finished by persuading him to go home and unburthen his sad heart to his wife.

I must confess, notwithstanding all that I had said, I felt some little solicitude for the result, who can calculate on the fortitude of one whose whole life has been a round of pleasures? Her gay spirit might revolt at the dark, downward path of low humility, suddenly pointed out before her, and might cling to the sunny regions in which they had hitherto revelled. Besides, ruin in fashionable life is accompanied by so many galling

mortifications to which, in other ranks, it is a burden. In short, I could not meet Leslie the next morning, without trepidation. He had made the disclosure.

'And how did she bear it?'  
'Like an angel. It seemed rather to be a relief to her mind, for she threw herself round my neck and asked me if this was all that had lately made me unhappy. 'But poor girl,' added he, 'she cannot realize the change we must undergo. She has no idea of poverty but in the abstract, she has only read of it in poetry, where it is allied to love. She feels as one yet in privation, and suffers no loss of accustomed conveniences or elegancies. When we come practically to experience its sordid cares, its paltry wants, its petty humiliations—there will be the real trials.'

'But,' said I, 'now that you have got over the severest task, that of breaking it to her, the sooner you let the world into the secret the better. The disclosure may be mortifying; but then it is a single misery, and soon over, whereas you otherwise suffer it, in anticipation, every hour of the day. It is not poverty, so much as pretence, that harrasses a ruined man—the struggle between a proud mind and an empty purse, to keep up a hollow show that must soon come to an end. Have the courage to appear poor, and you disarm poverty of its sharpest sting. On this point I felt Leslie perfectly prepared. He had no false pride himself, and as to his wife, she was only anxious to conform herself to their altered fortunes.

Some days afterwards, he called upon me in the evening. He had disposed of his dwelling house, and taken a small cottage in the country a few miles from the town. He had been busied all day, in sending out furniture. The new establishment required few articles, and those of the simplest kind. All the splendid furniture of his late residence had been sold, excepting his wife's harp. That he said, was too closely associated with the idea of herself, it belonged to the little story of their loves, for some of the sweetest moments of their courtship were those when he leaned over that instrument, and listened to the melting tones of her voice. I could not but smile at this instance of romantic gallantry in a dotting husband.

He was now going to the cottage, where his wife had been all day, superintending its arrangement. My feelings had become strongly interested in the progress of this family story, and as it was a fine evening, I offered to accompany him.

He was wearied with the fatigues of the day, and as we walked out, fell into a fit of gloomy musing.

'Poor Mary,' at length broke, with a heavy sigh, from his lips.

'And what of her,' asked I, 'has any thing happened her?'

'What,' said he, darting an impatient glance, 'is it nothing to be reduced to this paltry situation—to be caged in a miserable cottage—to be obliged to toil almost in the meanest concerns of her wretched habitation?'

'Has she then repined at the change?'

'Repined! she has been nothing but sweetness and good humor. Indeed, she seems in better spirits than I have ever known her; she has been to me all love, and tenderness, and comfort.'

'Admirable girl,' exclaimed I. 'You call yourself poor, my friend; you were never so rich—you never knew the boundless treasures of excellence you possessed in that woman.'

'No, but my friend, if this first meeting at the cottage were over, I think I could then be comfortable. But this is her first day of real experience; she has been introduced into a humble dwelling—she has been employed all day in arranging its miserable equipments—she has first time known the fatigues of domestic employment, she has for the first time looked around her on a home destitute of every thing elegant, almost of every thing convenient; and may now be sitting down, exhausted and spiritless, brooding over a prospect of future poverty.'

There was a degree of probability in this picture that I could not gainsay, so we walked on in silence.

After turning from the main road, up a narrow lane, so thinly shaded by forest trees as to give it a complete air of seclusion, we came in sight of the cottage. It was humble enough in its appearance for the most humble poet, and yet it had a pleasing rural look. A wild vine had overrun one end with a profusion of foliage; a few trees threw their branches gracefully over it; and I observed several pots of flowers tastefully disposed about the door, and on the grassplot in front. A small wicket gate opened upon a footpath that wound through some shrubbery

to the door. Just as we approached, we heard the sound of music, Leslie grasped my arm, we paused and listened. It was Mary's voice, singing, in a style of the most touching simplicity, a little air of which her husband was peculiarly fond.

I felt Leslie's hand tremble on my arm. He stepped forward to hear more distinctly. His step made a noise on the gravel-walk. A bright beautiful face glanced out at the window, and vanished—a light footstep was heard—and Mary came tripping forth to meet us. She was in a pretty rural dress of white; a few wild flowers were twisted in her hair; a fresh bloom was on her cheek; her whole countenance beamed with smiles—I had never seen her look so lovely.

'My dear George,' cried she, 'I am so glad you are come, I have been watching for you, and running down the lane, and looking out for you. I've set out a table under a beautiful tree behind the cottage; and I've been gathering some of the most delicious strawberries, for I know you are fond of them—and we have such excellent cream—and every thing is so sweet and still here.—Oh!' said she, putting her arm within his, and looking up brightly in his face, 'Oh, we shall be so happy.'

Poor Leslie was overcome.—He caught her to his bosom, he folded his arms round her, he kissed her again and again he could not speak, but the tears gushed into his eyes, and he has often assured me, that though the world has since gone prosperously with him, and his life has indeed been a happy one, yet never has he experienced a moment of more exquisite felicity.

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SABBATH EVENING THOUGHTS

BY CHARLES LANMAN.

EVER since I was a child I have always thought the Sabbath to be one of the most beautiful of days. In the pilgrimage of life it is our resting place; and as we approach it we may lay by all our cares, and prepare the mind for the society and converse of God and holy angels. Who is there, in the Christian world at least, that does not welcome with joy, the Sabbath evening? To me it comes fraught with a thousand pleasing recollections of childhood, and in fancy I behold myself innocent and happy. It is the hour best fitted for calm and sober reflections—for the veil twilight is spread over the landscape, and seems to hide from view the busy cares of the coming week.

I have been standing this afternoon beside the mound where lies interred the body of a dear friend. Even beside his grave I was not sorrowful for I knew that he had died a christian; and I remembered the many happy hours we had passed together, when we were young and strangers to the world. It does not make me sad to think of the departed, when I know they have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. I know not why thinking upon death should make the heart gloomy! Is it we wish our friends to live forever in this 'valley of tears.' Are we so selfish as to mourn, because they are happy in another and better world? I love the poet and the christian who could write these words:

I would not live always; I ask not to stay  
Where storm after storm rises dark o'er the way!

The few lurid mornings that dawn on us here,  
Are enough for life's woes, full enough for its cheers.

It is twenty short summers ago, this day, that four happy boys were seated upon a beautiful hill in New-England. The services of the Sabbath were ended, and they had gathered there to gaze upon the setting sun. They looked with pleasure at the golden clouds, lingering in the west, but little did they think those clouds were emblems of themselves. I remember with what fond anticipations each looked into the future. Before their visions, every thing was bright and full of promise. One, a dark-haired noble boy, said, 'I would be a sailor.' He left his home to roam upon the sea; but the voice of the tempest does not disturb him now, for his body is beneath the wave. Another said—'I wish to be an opulent merchant.' He also left his home and friends, and became a man of wealth in a distant clime, among strangers; but in the prime of manhood he was called to die, and the cypress now sighs above his grave. Another said—'I long for the applause of man.' Ambition urged him onward, and the world did for a time listen to the magic of his name; but alas! he too is among the forgotten dead. These three, dearest friends of my boyhood, have gone to the world of spirits; and the fourth, the most unworthy one of all, is still in the land of the living. Strange and mysterious indeed, are the workings of Providence!