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WIDOWHOOD.

BY MISS CATHARINE M. SEDGWICK.

"For thy dear sake, I will walk patiently
Through these long hours, nor call their minutes pain."

Frances Anne Butler.

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Many, many years have passed since I was called, with other loving friends, to witness the marriage of Emily Remson to Murray Winthrop. Never was there a better-sorted pair, nor a marriage under happier auspices. They had known each other from childhood; their parents, their grandparents, were friends. There was no element of discord in their natures — they were born to an inheritance of healthy minds and hearts. They were educated with sound views of life and duty. They had the same circle of interests, tastes, and inclinations. They might be strictly called homogeneous—everything in them blending in harmony. There was no difference between them (in these days of bold assertion, to the contrary, we are old-fashioned enough to believe there is a difference), but that which distinguishes the man from the woman. Milton has said it better than any one can say it after him —

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"For contemplation he, and valour form'd,
For softness she, and sweet, attractive grace."

There could not be, there never were questions of " absolute rule" and " subjection" between them, for their wills were blended in one.

The families of both parties were present, and showers of prayers, and wishes, and sympathies consecrated the occasion. It was a general family festival — a "beautiful hour; when in every cloud stood a smiling angel, who, instead of rain-drops, showered down flowers."

For fifteen years life fairly kept its promise to them. There was but one flaw in their happiness, and that I have often heard Emily cheerfully say, "I ought not to wish to escape from, and I do not ; there must be something — some earthy sediment in the clearest cup ; and what could I have easier to bear than the ill-health that seems to double my husband's tenderness, and stimulate his invention to open new sources of enjoyment to me."

We often wish that our countrywomen had more health, more vigour, and more of the independence and self-reliance that spring from physical force. And the time is coming, when the

want of these will cease to be their reproach, but, in the meanwhile, we thank God, that, as in all evil, there is some providential mitigation — a reflection of his love even in the tear-drop ; so the debility of our women is, in *some slight degree*, compensated by the gentleness, tenderness, and sympathy that accompanies it. If our wives lean, they find the strongest support — if they are weak and dependent, their husbands are, for the most part, considerate, generous, and devoted.

So, assuredly, was my friend Murray Winthrop. Emily

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was a wife after the old Israelitish pattern, leaning in her very nature; “her desire was unto her husband”— desire, without the fear of patriarchal times. She was as free as if she were unyoked, for she had no wish independent of her husband's, and certainly no enjoyment without a partition with him. It was not that she lost her distinctive character, as certain colours are deadened by the proximity of stronger ones, but like a lesser stream, she blended with a fuller one — not losing her own power, but giving more force to his. She was not one of those silly, " just as Mr. So-and-so pleases" wives, or " I have not asked husband, but just as he thinks, I shall think." Emily thought and acted freely; the mainspring was in her heart, and that brought out the perfect accord. I have never seen a happier home than theirs — sanctified by the rites of religion, and cheerful with every social blessing and virtue.

Fifteen happy years passed on. They had six lovely children. They had not riches, but uniform prosperity. Winthrop had an honourable profession, and a certain income, and he delighted to surround his wife with every indulgence that could mitigate the evil of her ill-health. He could not afford a carriage, but a carryall with one horse, gave her the refreshment of a daily drive with her husband, more enjoying to her than if she had had a liveried coachman and half a dozen footmen in livery. Neither could they afford a country-seat, but they went for some happy weeks every summer to the sea-shore, or to the hill-country. They did not indulge in magnificent dinner-parties, but there was always a seat and a welcome for a friend at their table — and a good dinner, too, for Winthrop in his daily marketing, procured some dainty, to secure for Emily the blessing of a relished meal.

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She was sometimes unable to walk up and down stairs, but her husband carried her in his arms, and then, as she said, she was more to be envied than pitied.

I linger in their sunshine. The fifteen years were passed! Winthrop went to New Orleans to help a beloved and only brother through an entanglement with a fraudulent merchant. In order to extricate him, Winthrop pledged a large portion of his own property. If their lives were preserved, there was no risk of final loss; and full of life and health, they scarcely thought of the contingency.

They sailed for New York. A tempest came on — The ship was dismasted and unmanageable. A part of the crew and passengers took to the boats; Winthrop and his brother, by the captain's advice, remained on the wreck. Winthrop, at the moment they were lowering the boat, wrote in pencil on a card the following line to his wife, and gave it to one of the passengers

who was abandoning the ship : — *“In all events, trust in God, as I now do, my Emily. His will be done.”*

The wreck went down in sight of the boats! They came to land. The news was sent to Emily by the passenger who transmitted to her her husband's last token, and she was plunged at once, without the poor preparation of an apprehension, from cheerful anticipations, into the desolation of widowhood. She would gladly have covered her face and died. The light of her life was gone. Not even her children reflected one ray of light to her. The impulse to action was lost — the springs of hope were dried up. No more smoothing of rough ways for her — no more anticipation of her wants — no more defence from hardship — no more providing — no more watching; no more companionship! She was alone! alone! How did that word strike, and strike upon her heart the knell

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of her departed life. The world was no longer the world she had lived in. Thick darkness had settled upon it. It was as if the sun had vanished, and the countless starry host had passed away. Day and night returned, but not to her came their sweet uses ; meal-times brought no refreshment; she lay down to wakeful nights and troubled dreams, and awoke to feel again, and again the first blow in all its activeness and freshness. Her children were as nothing to her. One blank despair had closed the access to all other passions. There was nothing left but a capacity for suffering. Where was her religion? — alas! alas! she had loved her husband supremely. She had forsaken her God — He had not forsaken her.

I have said that Emily derived no comfort from her children. In this I found some excuse for her, for it indicated to me that her mind had lost its balance, and that she had not the power to give herself to the holiest ministrations of nature. But there was one influence that seemed to reach her. Annie, her fourth child, a girl nine years old, had an uncommonly sweet voice, and when her mother was exhausted with mourning and watching, and her pulses were throbbing and every nerve was in tormenting action, she would send for Annie to sit by her bedside and sing to her. There was a magnetic influence in the child's tender voice. Her mother would become calm, and sometimes fall asleep. The poor little girl would sing on, infected with her mother's sadness, with tears in her eyes, no matter whether it were a verse from a hymn, or a stanza from a song. Her eldest sister Mary, a thoughtful girl, said to her one day, " I wish you very much, dear Annie, to learn two or three hymns through, and when you find mamma getting quiet, sing them to her." The docile child readily acquiesced. Mary, guided by the instincts of the

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highest feeling, selected the hymns, and on the next fitting occasion, when her poor mother was tranquilized, and the intervals between her heart-breaking sighs were longer, Annie sang the following beautiful hymn; she had till then sang those most familiar and hackneyed, and the words had flowed on the sound without producing any impression. The consciousness of having

a purpose, varied the general monotony of her singing, and the first half line roused her mother's attention.

“Weep thou, O mourner ! but in lamentation
 May thy Redeemer still remembered be;
 Strong is his arm, the God of thy salvation,
 Strong is his love to cheer and comfort thee.

“Cold though the world be in the way before thee,
 Wail not in sadness, o'er the darkling tomb;
 God in his love, still watcheth kindly o'er thee,
 Light shineth still above the clouds of gloom.

“Dimmed though thine eyes be with the tears of sorrow,
 Night only known beneath the sky of time.
 Faith can behold the dawning of a morrow
 Glowing in smiles of love, and joy sublime.

“Change, then, mourner, grief to exultation ;
 Firm and confiding may thy spirit be ;
 Strong is his arm, the God of thy salvation ;
 Strong is his love to cheer and comfort thee !”

Before Annie finished the hymn, her mother raised her head, and leaning on her elbow, she drank in every word, as if it were inspiration addressed by Heaven to her soul. When the child had finished, she drew her to her bosom and wept, for the first time, freely, tears that relieved her burdened heart —

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tears in which other thoughts than those of grief mingled. As soon as she could speak, she said, “Annie, sing that last verse to me again.”

Annie repeated it, and her mother repeated after her the last line —

“Strong is His love to cheer and comfort thee!”

“What love!” she added, “what patience — with me, a wretched rebel!”

“Oh, don't say so, mamma !” said Annie. “I have one more hymn to sing to you, that I think is beautiful; shall I sing it?”

“Yes; yes, dear child, sing on, and God grant me grace to hear,” she added, in mental prayer.

Annie sang “The Angels of Grief,” of Whittier, a poet who has given to his high poetic gifts the holiest consecration.

“With silence only as their benediction,
God's angels come
Where, in the shadow of a great affliction,
The soul sits dumb.

“Yet would we say what every heart approveth —
Our Father's will,
Calling to Him the dear ones whom he loveth,
Is mercy still.

“Not upon us or ours the solemn angel
Hath evil wrought;
The funeral anthem is a glad evangel;
The good die not.”

A few moments' silence followed. Emily then kissed her

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child, with a quiet tenderness that she had not before shown, and dismissed her. She did not remain in bed, sighing and lamenting, but she arose and passed the night in walking her chamber, or on her knees. She reproached herself bitterly. She felt that she had forgotten her religious profession — that she had denied her Lord in suffering her faith and love to be consumed in the furnace from which they should have come out purified. Now, for the first, it seemed to her that she received her husband's last words to her, — “Trust in God, as I now do, my Emily. His will be done.” He, in his extremity, was willing, she thought. He rose above the storm — the tempest

carried away my trust. He reposed in me — he thought, in that dreadful hour, that he might commit the children to my care. I have forgotten them, and every other duty — I have lain, like a vine torn from the tree that supported it, prostrate, withering, and dying, and I am a creature endowed with a capacity to do as well as to suffer. In my prosperity, I believed I was a Christian! — how have I sunk below the requirements of this profession. Have I been patient in tribulation? Have I submitted to the fellowship of suffering — of self-forgetfulness — of self-renunciation. No, no! I have thought only of myself. I have dared to expect that life should continue the joy it has been. And now, as I am resolved to look forward, and not back, God help me!

The next morning, to the astonishment of her children, Emily appeared among them. She took her accustomed place at table, and calmly served them. She even spoke to them of their father, and of the double duty that had now devolved upon her. She felt a faintness coming over, and desisted, wisely resolving to enter by degrees upon her new field of labour.

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Life had utterly changed to her. During her husband's life, she had been the object of constant indulgence, and a tenderness that fenced off not only evil, but whatever was uncomfortable and disagreeable. This is a false position; it cannot last. There is no *petting* in life. The school of Providence is a school of discipline and trial. Emily

“Had slept, and dreamed that life was beauty —
She waked, and found that life was duty.”

But this duty was to make her a higher and nobler being. Till now she had been gentle, sweet, and attractive, but loving a life of passive and indulged invalidism, she had had scarcely more to do with actual affairs, than the ladies of a Haram. If she had died then, she would have left no void but in the hearts of those that loved her. She had now to seal her sorrows up in her own breast; to endure patiently and silently her own loneliness; to make sunshine for others, while she felt that her whole life must wear out in chill dreary shadow. But she had religiously resolved, and she amazed her friends with her noiseless vigour. She found, on investigation, that her income was reduced to very narrow limits. She courageously and at once reduced her expenses to her means.

Some women deem it unfeminine to take care of their pecuniary affairs, and certainly their training and social arrangements are unfavourable to their qualification for this care. To Emily there was but one question; is this my duty? that ascertained she went forward and did it. She sought advice when she needed it, and aid where she required it, but, for the most part, she took care of her own concerns, and she “saw well to the ways of her household.”

She provided for the education of her children; she sighed

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to be obliged to renounce advantages for them which she had once counted upon as matters of course, but “It is well,” she said, — “the necessity of putting forth all their powers and making the most of all their means is better than Harvard for my boys, and the ‘first masters’ for my girls.” She now truly honoured her husband's memory, and justified his love.

She made her home a scene of cheerfulness to her children, a pleasant gathering-place to her friends.

What had become of the elegant leisure, the luxurious indolence of Emily Winthrop? They had given place to virtuous, productive activity. Where was the invalidism that all the appliances of love had but served to nurture?

No allopathy, homoeopathy, or hydropathy had been called in, but mental energy and heart-energy had supplied that wonderful power called nervous energy; and from day to day, and year to year her strength was equal to the demands upon it.

The young maiden invested with beauty and hope and promise, strikes our imagination. The happy wife has all our sympathies; but she who extracts patience and peace from her own privations, who converts her own weakness into strength for others, who in her own waste places produces flowers and fruits for them, who walks alone through rough places leaning on the Unseen — she — the sanctified widow — has our highest reverence.