

THE
WIFE REFORMED.



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The W I F E, &c.

SARAH SMITHWAITE, early in life, married an honest industrious man, who was by trade a mason. For the two first years of her marriage she was as happy as a good husband and a prudent conduct could make her; she was very notable, took great pride in seeing her house clean and in order, and if her little boy had but a rag on it was clean and tidy. When Richard, for so her husband was called, came home from work on a winter's evening he was sure to return to a bright little fire, and to be met by a wife with so smiling and cheerful a countenance, that if things had gone somewhat cross in the day, and his temper was a little ruffled, his good-humour was quickly restored. Honest Richard was so happy in his wife and child that he scarcely ever spent an evening from his own fire-side, and the care he saw his wife take of what he earned, and the many comforts, through her good management, it pro-

cured him, was such a spur to his industry, that he pursued his daily labours cheerfully, and got forward apace. But alas! this happiness was soon interrupted.

Unhappily, Sarah formed an intimacy with a Mrs. Clacket, who was lately come to be her neighbour: this woman was a great gossip; instead of being at home in her family she was all the morning gadding from house to house; she would call on this neighbour and the other neighbour; stop half an hour to hear news at one house, then make a call at another to communicate what she had heard, and so on till the whole morning would pass away, while her children were going in rags, and acquiring a thousand bad habits by idling about the streets. "Evil communication," we are told by the apostle, "corrupts good-manners," and the truth of this was never more strikingly illustrated than in Sarah. Mrs. Clacket never failed to take her neighbour Smithwaite in her rounds, and was so chatty, and had always so much news to communicate, that Sarah thought her the most agreeable person in the whole village, and considered her time well employed in listening to her, though her work would in the mean time stand still by the hour together; nor was this the worst; the visits Sarah received from her neighbour Clacket she

she must necessarily return, and then how could she refuse to go with her neighbour to make a few calls, as she termed it; in short, Sarah, by constantly associating with Mrs. Clacket got such a habit of gadding, that she was never easy in her house, and grew so much to resemble her, that from being one of the best, she became one of the worst of wives and mothers.

It had been Sarah's favourite maxim hitherto, that "a Stitch in time saves nine," and she had always found her account in adhering to it, but her frequent junketings with her neighbour Clacket, and others of the same turn, to whom she had introduced her, took up so much of her time, that she could find none to attend to the cares of her family. If her little boy had a hole in his coat or stocking, Sarah would suffer it to remain from day to day, till it was so large it would take five times as long to mend it, and, after all, would look very unsightly: in short, every thing was neglected; her house, from being one of the cleanest, was now one of the most dirty and disorderly in the village, and all that she could crib out of her husband's earnings went to buy frippery ornaments, to make her fit, as she used to say, to keep company with her betters. for so she called Mrs. Clacket, because she had more money and could dress better.

This sort of conduct could not be pleasing to Richard ; at first he expostulated in mild terms, and endeavoured by gentle language to recal her to a sense of her duty ; but finding that all he said was of no avail, and that Sarah still continued her follies, his temper became soured and irritated ; he returned from work peevish and out of humour, and often sought in an ale house the comforts he used to look for at home ; he no longer pursued his work with his usual alacrity ; the spur to his industry was gone ; he worked no more at over-hours, by which his weekly stipend was formerly much increased, the comforts it once produced him were no more, and he became careless and neglectful. Sarah could not but observe this change in her husband, and complained loudly of it to her neighbour Clacket, especially of his peevish temper, which, she said, was past bearing. Mrs. Clacket condoled with her upon her hard fate, but said it was entirely her own fault ; “ Only,” said she, “ pluck up a little spirit, give him as good as he sends, and I’ll warrant you will soon bring him into better humour.”

Sarah had too high an opinion of her friend not to take her advice : the next time her husband expostulated with her upon her neglect of her family, Sarah, in the words of her friend, *gave him as good as he brought ;*
instead

instead of opposing silence, at least, to his too just rebukes, she bade him look to himself before he reprov'd her, and began to enumerate every folly he had committed since she had known him; and not content with this, added those of father, mother, sisters, and brothers. This incens'd Richard, and provok'd him to use many bad words, which Sarah returned fourfold, for since her intimacy with Mrs. Clacket, she was, like her, become very loquacious, or talkative.

Though this conduct did not produce the effect on her husband's temper Sarah was assur'd it would, and though she saw that instead of mending his humour it irritated it, she, nevertheless, continued to aggravate on every occasion, and to give her tongue such license, that the house was a continued scene of strife whenever she and her husband were in it. It happened one Sunday morning, according to custom, that when Richard call'd for a pair of stockings, none were to be found that did not want mending, and he was oblig'd to wait while his wife sewed up two or three holes before he could put them on. This, as I have before hinted, was no new thing; it repeatedly happened; but Richard was this morning, perhaps, less in a humour to bear it without murmuring; he made some remarks

upon her neglect, and threw out some bitter reflections against her neighbour Clacket, to whose vile example he attributed all her misconduct. Sarah retorted with her usual flippancy; for every word of Richard's she returned ten, and as she knew that would aggravate him more than any thing else, she began to revert to the faults of his father, who having in his youth been addicted to liquor, had saved nothing to support him in his age, and was now chiefly maintained out of his son's earnings, added to a small matter he received weekly from the parish. Richard had for some time borne all with tolerable temper, but this raised his choler to such a pitch, that it was with the utmost difficulty he restrained himself from striking her: Sarah seeing his hand raised against her was frightened, and began for the first time to think she had gone a little too far; but too proud to make any concessions, or even by her silence to let him see, as she called it, that he had gained his point, she continued the same aggravating language; and when Richard, with a very bad word, declared he would by some means prevent her keeping company with that vile woman who had corrupted her, to shew him how little she regarded what he said, she took her hat and cloak from a nail in the wall, and turned out of
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the house, saying she should not give up the only friend she had in the world to please him, nor any husband ten times as good. Richard was going to stop her, but feeling his passion again to rise, and fearing he might be provoked to strike her, he was prudent enough to let her go, and sat down to recover himself. When his passion had somewhat subsided, and he began to reflect coolly on what had happened, he was sensible that however great the provocation, he had done wrong in suffering passion so far to get the better of his reason; for he justly reflected, that if he could not bring about the reformation of his wife by gentle means, there was little hopes of effecting it by violence; on all accounts, therefore, he repented giving way to passion. Sarah in the mean time hastened to her friend Clacket to tell all her grievances, and to rail against her husband; but she was much disappointed to find that she was gone out for the whole day. Not knowing what to do with herself, and in no humour, to return home, she sauntered down a green lane at a little distance from her house, without knowing whither she was going and reflecting with bitterness on the miserable life she led, which far from attributing to her own folly, she laid wholly to the humour of what she called a bad husband. She had not

gone far before she was overtaken by Mr. Allen, the curate of the village. There could not be a more worthy benevolent character than this gentleman. He had heard that Sarah and her husband did not live so happily together as formerly, and that her misconduct and intimacy with Dame Clacket was the cause of their disagreement; he wished to inquire into the truth, and to give Sarah a little wholesome advice if necessary, the present seemed a good opportunity, and he immediately accosted her.

Mr. Allen. Good morrow, neighbour Smithwaite, how is your husband, and the little chubby boy I used to admire so much?

Sarah courtesying. Both pure well, thank you, Sir.

Mr. Allen. Well, and how do you go on? I suppose by this time, as you have no great increase of family, you have been able to lay by a little matter against a rainy day.

Sarah. Against a rainy day! Sir, I assure you we are much worse off than ever.

Mr. Allen. How so? you have had no sickness in your family I hope?

Sarah. No, Sir, no sickness, thank God we have all been pure well.

Mr. Allen. Then how is it that you are worse off than you used to be? I always understood that Richard was an industrious man, and one of the best of husbands.

Sarah.

Sarah. Ah ! Sir, *was*, yes, he *was* one of the best husbands, but he is not now what he used to be.

Mr. Allen. I am sorry to hear this ; I hope he has not taken to drinking ?

Sarah. Why as to that, Sir, I cannot say that he ever gets in liquor, but he spends almost all his evenings at the Swan ; time was he used to spend them at home at his own fire-side.

Mr. Allen. This is a bad habit indeed ; it is astonishing to me that a man should prefer an ale-house, when he has a clean comfortable fire-side of his own, and a good-humoured wife to receive him, and no doubt *Sarah* you take care that your husband has both there.

Sarah, with some confusion. Why, Sir, when people have families, you know, they cannot expect things to be always in print ; where one has only two rooms and a little shed, and washing, and cooking, and mending, and making, and all to do, one must sometimes be in a little disorder ; but *Richard* has no thought of that, if every thing is not just in its place, or he has to wait a quarter of an hour for his dinner, or while a button is sewed on his shirt, the house is too hot to hold him, I am sure I lead the life of a dog with him : he is not the man he used to be.

Mr.

Mr. Allen. He was not then always subject to this violence of temper?

Sarah. Oh no, Sir, for two years after we were married there was not a better husband, nor a better tempered man in the world; and so industrious! It would surprize you, Sir, to know how much money he got by working over hours.

Mr. Allen. He neglects his business now, I suppose?

Sarah. Why no, Sir, I cannot say that neither; to be sure he does not let the child or me want for any thing, but he never works at over-hours as he used to do; he has got it in his head that he shall be none the richer if he gets ever so much, because he says I manage so badly; indeed he seems to take delight now in nothing but quarrelling with me; I'm sure I lead the life of a dog.

Mr. Allen. In most differences between man and wife, neighbour Smithwaite, there are faults on both sides; now let us examine a little whether you are not as much, if not more in fault than your husband; from what you have said, and what I have before heard, I am inclined to think this the case. You do not, I think, accuse Richard of drinking, nor any vice of that kind. Though he does not work at over-hours, you say he takes care that neither you nor your child should

should want for any thing; your principal charge is against his temper. An irritable temper is certainly very reprehensible, but as you say that for two years after your marriage Richard was one of the best *temper-ed* men, I am persuaded such a change could not take place without some cause; can you now lay your hand on your heart, and say seriously, that you have never given your husband provocation?

Sarah. Why, Sir, he has taken it into his head to be in his airs because I keep company with my neighbour Clacket, who is as good a sort of woman as any in the world; if it was not for her I should not be able to bear with his humours; but I go and tell her my troubles, and she comforts me, and advises me what to do. Indeed if she had not persuaded me to pluck up a little spirit, there would have been no living with him; but Richard has no word bad enough for her, because she is my friend; but I am determined never to give her up, and so I have told him.

Mr. Allen. This is not acting as a good wife, Sarah. It is your duty to love, honour and obey your husband; God commands you so to do; and however light you may think of this commandment, you have sworn at the altar to keep it.

Sarah. Yes, Sir; but this is such an unreasonable thing!

Mr.

Mr. Allen. It is your duty to give up to your husband, Sarah, in all things that are not criminal; and in this instance Richard has, if what I have heard be true, very good reason for objecting to your intimacy with Dame Clacket, who is, to my knowledge, a very idle gossiping woman, neither a good wife nor a good mother.

Sarah. Dear, does your Reverence think so? I'm sure I never saw any harm of her in my life; to be sure she and her husband quarrels, and she is obliged in her own defence to give him as good as he brings, or he would, as she says, trample her under foot; but I'm sure if he would let her alone she would not begin.

Mr. Allen. I am afraid, Sarah, you have imbibed too many of her principles for your own or your husband's happiness. I am told, and I now fear it is too true, that you are continually from home junketing with this woman, that you meet only to rail against, and talk over the faults of your husbands; and that by these means you stir up each other to oppose and aggravate their tempers.

Sarah felt the force of these truths too strongly to reply immediately; she hesitated, and was covered with confusion, to find the venerable curate so well acquainted with her manner of going on. At length she said, to
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be sure she could not say but she had got a habit of being from home more than she used to be, and she often thought she would break through it, but her neighbour Clacket always said so much that she could never refuse.

Mr. *Allen*. Can you then wonder at your husband wishing to break off a connection, which, by your own account, leads you into things that you know to be wrong. If Dame Clacket were your true friend she would advise you to that only which would conciliate the affections of your husband, and make your life comfortable.

Sarah. I'll answer for it, Sir, she means no harm. To be sure she did tell me to give my husband as good as he sent, when he scolded, and I believe I may have now and then gone rather too far with that, as I have this morning.

Mr. *Allen* understanding that a dispute had recently happened, insensibly led Sarah to give him a detail of the particulars, which she did, and so impartially, that he was at no loss to see that the fault, as he had reason to think it usually did, lay in her aggravating tongue, he therefore went on thus:

Mr. *Allen*. From the account you have given me, Mrs. Smithwaite, we see the truth of the Apostle James's words, "The tongue

tongue is a little member that boasteth great things." " Behold, continues he, " how great a matter a little fire kindleth." In other words, observe how much strife and animosity may be occasioned by one thoughtless or aggravating word; one bad word naturally leads to another, till the fury of each party is kindled, and blows and murders are often the consequence.

Sarah. Yes, Sir, to be sure, I might be wrong; but you cannot think how cross and ill-natured Richard spoke about the stockings, though I am sure I was not more than ten minutes mending them.

Mr. Allen. " A soft answer," my good woman, we are told by Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, " turneth away wrath."

Now had you recollected this, and, instead of irritating your husband's temper, which was already ruffled, had told him you were sorry for the neglect, and would endeavour to prevent it in future, be assured his anger would soon have passed away, and the disagreeable consequences that succeeded entirely avoided.

Sarah. Why, to be sure, I must own I did provoke him; I am sorry now that I said so much, but if I had been to be killed for it I could not have helped it at the time.

Mr. Allen. The scripture tells us, Mrs. Smithwaite, that " The tongue is a fire, a world

world of iniquity," that "it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the whole course of nature:" now so much power being attributed to the tongue, we ought to consider it as one of the most important duties to govern it wisely; it was given us to utter the praises of our Creator, not to blaspheme his holy name, and to become an instrument of strife and contention among our brethren, whom we are commanded to love and edify. I speak thus to you, Mrs. Smithwaite, because I see you regularly at church, and conclude, therefore, that you have some sense of religion.

Sarah. I hope so, sir, for I say my prayers regularly.

Mr. Allen. The mere repetition of prayers, or attendance on church, (I mean where it produces no effect on our conduct) can avail little; if we hope to please God and live with Christ, we must cultivate that spirit of meekness and forbearance, an example of which he sets us in his blessed life: our faith is nothing if it produce not such fruits, for by these shall we know that we are truly his disciples. You may, perhaps, think, that if you avoid yielding to passion yourself it is sufficient, that our duty ends in restraining our own passions; but it is far otherwise, we must have

have regard to the infirmities of our poor brethren, assist them in fighting the good fight, and be careful not to throw in their way a cause of stumbling or offence; it is our duty to avoid every word, look, or action, that is likely to excite or rouse those evil propensities which more or less lie dormant in us all, and are too ready to break forth on the slightest occasions; every one must feel that the flesh lusteth continually against the spirit; and are we not, think you, accountable for the sins of our brother, if instead of assisting him to overcome the evil of his nature, we provoke and excite it? When we see our brother on the point of yielding to the passion of anger, and stir up or encourage it by any provoking or aggravating language, do we not, think you, tempt him to evil, and become guilty of his sin? St. James advises us to "keep a strict guard on our tongue, lest it tempt our brother to evil." "If any man," says the apostle, "offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." In another place he adds, "The tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." The words of our Lord himself on this subject are very remarkable, and deserving the most serious consideration. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth

bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things; out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh: But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment, "for by thy mouth shalt thou be justified, and by thy mouth shalt thou be condemned." Oh, Mrs. Smithwaite, this is an awful denunciation, and from the lips of truth itself! let it sound ever in your ears, and prevent your giving your tongue a licence you shall fear to recollect in that tremendous day.

Sarah. Oh, Sir! I am quite shocked at what you tell me; I never thought I had been so wicked; I am convinced I have done wrong, and will never in future provoke my husband in the manner I have done. I will return home and entreat his forgiveness.

Mr. Allen. The winding of this lane, if I am not mistaken leads to your cottage: come, I will go with you, and have the pleasure of witnessing your reconciliation.

Sarah. Oh, Sir, how good you are! I begin to think I have been more in fault than Richard; for to be sure, when I come to consider, it is a long time since he has had a comfortable fire-side to come to.

Mr. Allen.

Mr. Allen. I am rejoiced, my good Sarah, to hear you talk thus, the fault that is seen and acknowledged is half amended; believe me you will find far more pleasure in performing your duty than in attending to the gossip and junketing of your neighbour Clacket.

Sarah. You have convinced me, Sir, that it is my duty to obey my husband, therefore, if it is his will, I will certainly, whatever it may cost me, break off with Dame Clacket. At this moment they entered the cottage, where Richard, who had the day before strained his thumb, so that he could not go to work, was sitting and ruminating on the unhappy propensities of his wife. He rose respectfully to receive the good curate, but when he introduced his wife to him as a penitent for the faults she had committed, and heard her acknowledge them, ask his forgiveness, and declare her resolution to amend, he was almost beside himself with joy; notwithstanding the presence of the curate, he took her round the neck, and giving her a hearty kiss, declared, that if she would make good her words, and be to him the wife she was when they first married, he would never spend an evening at an ale-house, nor again give her a crooked word.

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The good curate was delighted with the reconciliation his admonitions had brought about, he received their mutual thanks and bade them farewell, promising to call upon them again. Sarah told her husband she would break off her connection with Mrs. Clacket; but Richard was so pleased with the conduct of his wife, that he said, if it would give her pain he would not desire it, as she seemed so sensible of her errors, and to know so well how to amend them, for while he took a walk with his little boy, she had set about cleaning her apartment and setting things in order, washed the table-cloth, and had every thing in order for his return. Nor was this sudden resolution soon forgotten, Sarah persevered in the same conduct with unremitting assiduity, and Richard in return became the same diligent, industrious, and kind husband he had formerly been. Mrs. Clacket several times called and endeavoured to joke Sarah out of the part she had taken, but she was now too well convinced of her errors to relapse, and found too much comfort in the path she had returned to, again to swerve from it, Mrs. Clacket, therefore, finding her opinions had not the same weight as formerly, made her calls less frequent, and last wholly dropt them: nor
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was this any vexation to Sarah ; she found, as Mr. Allen foretold, infinitely greater satisfaction in performing the duties of her station than in listening to the idle tales, or in attending to the junketings of her neighbour Clacket.

T H E E N D .

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