

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

VOL. 29. -- No. 342.

WELLINGTON, N.Z. DECEMBER 18, 1923.

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THE SIN AGAINST THE CHILD.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER II.

During May's convalescence many anxious thoughts haunted her mind. With a deep thankfulness that her baby had been spared the full penalty of its parent's wrongdoing, came also the conviction that it was her duty as a mother to ensure that her children should be "well born." Surely she knew how small was the hope that her husband would agree with her. He was drinking more heavily than usual, and all her gentle pleadings were turned aside.

This night he returned late with flushed cheek and unsteady step. She shrank from the embrace he sought to give her. His temper roused, he nastily remarked:

"That's a warm welcome to give your husband."

"I don't want to welcome you, and I don't want you for my husband." Almost involuntarily the words were wrung from her.

"Perhaps you don't, but you are my wife, and that's a solid fact which you cannot ignore."

"I will never be your wife," she answered wildly.

"Oh! won't you? We'll see about that," said Jack.

"You are not a fit husband for any good woman." May spoke, almost in a whisper.

"Am I not? Why not?" snapped her husband. "You were not so particular some time ago."

"Jack," she pleaded, "won't you listen to reason. If my baby had

lived I could never have forgiven you the wrong you did it, but he has been taken away, and I want to think as kindly of you as I can. Never again will I risk bringing a child into the world cursed with an alcoholic heredity."

"What about your duty to your husband?" he asked.

"My duty to my child and to the race is paramount. God requires of us all that we pass on to our children the gift of life untainted with evil. If I ever have another child it shall have its rightful heritage. Unless you consent to this we must part."

"You evidently overlook the fact that the law grants conjugal rights to a husband."

"What are conjugal rights?" she flashed out. "Does the law grant a man the right to compel his wife to bear diseased or mentally deficient children? If so, I can only say that our male politicians are more careful that their stock shall be well bred than that their children shall be well born."

"Well, let us leave the legal point. Does not your religion teach that what God has joined together man may not put asunder?"

"Jack, no one knows better than you do that God never joined us together."

"Who did? The devil, then," he sneered.

"Something like it," she replied. "Wine and the evil passions it aroused linked our lives together. I have paid the cost of my sin, and only God's mercy saved my child from its fearful cost. There is, in my opinion, only one supreme cause for divorce. Every woman has a right to divorce the man

who, through his evil habits, has unfitted himself to be the father of her children."

"Stop talking such nonsense, and remember your wifely duty." He made an attempt to draw her to him, but lightly evading him, she ran to her own room and locked her door.

The following morning, as May was in the garden, she heard the gate click. Looking up, she stood uncertain for a minute, and then rushed down the path into the outstretched arms of her father.

"Dad!" she cried, "did God send you to me?"

"I think He must," replied her father.

Mr Chapman was a leading lawyer in Sydney. She was his only child, and motherless since early girlhood. Lately he had heard whispers about her husband's manner of life, and had come over to see if she needed his help. Later on, as they sat in the garden, May told her father the sad story of the last year, and his heart burned as he listened.

"Dad, is it right to leave him?" she murmured.

"Yes, my child, both legally and morally his conduct has severed every tie which bound you to him."

Returning late that night, Jack Wilson was met by his father-in-law, and for once he heard the truth about himself from the lips of an upright, clean-living gentleman.

"I am taking May away to-morrow," he concluded. "Your mode of life unfits you to be the husband of a good woman, or the father of her children."

"I'm no worse than scores of other men." Jack thus defended himself.