

THE CONFESSIONS OF A WIFE

THE LAST PAGE IN THE "BOOK-OF-MY-GIRLHOOD"

CHAPTER II.

Dear old Doctor Atwater, who has just gone, said some very disquieting things to me, but I am sure that he is wrong. Dick and I are different from the whole world, and, like the princess in the fairy tale, we are going to "live happy every after." Love like ours cannot become cold.

When I went down to the library Dr. Atwater took both my hands in his and said:

"My! my!! Is it possible that the little baby I brought into the world is going to be married. I remember how happy your mother was that you were a girl."

"I am twenty-four, doctor," I said.

"Is that so?" he exclaimed. "It seems only like yesterday that the nurse brought you in and laid you in your mother's arms. And so you want me to act the father's part and 'give you away?'"

"Yes, dear friend of my dead father," I said, "you know I have no one—no relative to do this for me."

The old doctor put his arm around my shoulders and looked into my eyes and said solemnly:

"Margaret, have you thought much about what your life will be after tomorrow?"

I raised my eyes to look into his face, for it was a strange question, and then, like a torrent, the words came:

"Yes, I know it will be happiness—some one who loves me, always with me—some one to grieve when I grieve—some one to laugh when I laugh—some one always to be thinking of me."

"Don't you know, doctor, how lonely I have been all these years since mother died, with no one who was really mine—no one whose eyes would grow brighter because I came into their vision—no one to pet me and perhaps scold me a little? That's

what marriage with Dick will bring to me, doctor."

He looked at me a minute and said: "My dear girl, that is the ecstatic bliss of romantic love that you are describing and it makes gods and goddesses for a time of those human beings who experience it, but only gods can live upon the mountain tops, the rarified atmosphere of which we mortals cannot stand for long."

"Marriage, my child, is very different from this wonderful existence to which you are looking forward."

"Marriage is the universal BUSINESS OF WOMAN. It is obeying nature's great behest, and nature, my dear, takes no account of love."

"Don't think," he said, as I tried to interrupt him, "that I am not glad you love the man you are going to marry—I am—but I want you to know that marriage is very different from love. Marriage is the foundation of not only the home and state, but of civilization, and when a man and woman take upon themselves the marriage vows they do much more than selfishly to pledge their love; they covenant to do their share of the world's work. Joy or grief, happiness or sorrow, does not enter into it: You must 'honor until death do you part' and he must take you 'for better or for worse.'"

"The over-powering, all-embracing emotion of love, my child, that you feel now for the man you are going to marry is but a part of experience, but marriage is life in which the experience of love is but an incident. Love may be for a week, a month or a year, but marriage is for every day."

Before the good doctor had finished I had grown cold. I seemed to be able, for the first time since I had known Dick, to think of marriage as something else besides "being with him always." I suddenly remembered