A MORAL EXIGENCY.

BY MARY E. WILKINS.

At five o'clock, Eunice Fairweather went up-stairs to dress herself for the notable and Christmas tree to be given at the parsonage that night in honor of Christmas-eve. She had been very busy all day making preparations for it. She was the minister's daughter, and had, of a necessity, to take an active part in such affairs.

She took it as usual loyally and energetically, but there had always been seasons from her childhood—and she was twenty-five now—when the social duties to which she had been born seemed a weariness and a bore to her. They had seemed so to-day. She had patiently and faithfully sewed up little lace bags with divers colored worsteds, and stuffed them with candy. She had strung pop-corn, and marked the parcels which had been pouring in since daybreak from all quarters. She had taken her prominent part among the corps of indefatigable women always present to assist on such occasions, and kept up her end of the line as minister's daughter bravely. Now, however, the last of the zealous, chattering women she had been working with had bustled home, with a pleasant importance in every hitch of her shawled shoulders, and would not bustle back again until half-past six or so; and the tree, fully bedecked, stood in unconscious impressiveness in the parsonage parlor.

Eunice had come up-stairs with the resolution to dress herself directly for the festive occasion, and to hasten down again to be in readiness for new exigencies. Her mother was delicate, and had kept her room all day in order to prepare herself for the evening, her father was inefficient at such times, there was no servant, and the brunt of everything came on her.

But her resolution gave way; she wrapped herself in an old plaid shawl and lay down on her bed to rest a few minutes. She did not close her eyes, but lay studying idly the familiar details of the room. It was small, and one side ran in under the eaves; for the parsonage was a cottage. There was one window, with a white cotton curtain trimmed with tasselled fringe, and looped up on an old porcelain knob with a picture painted on it. That knob, with its tiny bright landscape, had been one of the pretty wonders of Eunice's childhood. She looked at it even now with interest, and the marvel and the beauty of it had not wholly departed for her eyes. The walls of the little room had a scraggly-patterned paper on them. The first lustre of it had departed, for that too was one of the associates of Eunice's childhood, but in certain lights there was a satin sheen and a blue line visible. Blur roses on a satin ground had been the original pattern. It had never been pretty, but Eunice had always had faith in it. There was an ancient straw matting on the floor, a home-made braided rug before the cottage bedstead, and one before the stained pine bureau. There were a few poor attempts at adornment on the walls; a splint letter case, a motto worked in worsteds, a gay print of an eminently proper little girl holding a faithful little dog.

This last, in its brilliant crudeness, was not a work of art, but Eunice believed in it. She was a conservative creature. Even after her year at the seminary, for which money had been scraped together five years ago, she had the same admiring trust in all the revelations of her childhood. Her home, on her return to it, looked as fair to her as it had always done; no old ugliness which familiarity had caused to pass unnoticed before gave her a shock of surprise.

She lay quietly, her shawl shrugged up over her face, so only her steady light brown eyes were visible. The room was drearily cold. She never had a fire; one in a sleeping-room would have been sinful luxury in the poor minister's family. Even her mother's was only warmed from the sitting-room.

In sunny weather Eunice's room was cheerful, and its look, if not actually its atmosphere, would warm one a little, for the windows faced south-west. But to-day all the light had come through low gray clouds, for it had been threatening snow ever since morning, and the room had been dismal.

A comfortless dusk was fast spreading over everything now. Eunice rose at length, thinking that she must either dress herself speedily, or go down-stairs for a candle.

She was a tall, heavily built girl, with large, well-formed feet and hands. She had a full face, and a thick, colorless skin. Her features were coarse, but their combination affected one pleasantly. It was a staunch, honest face, with a suggestion of obstinacy in it.

She looked unhappily at herself in her little square glass, as she brushed out her hair, and arranged it in a smooth twist at the top of her head. It was not becoming, but it was the way she had always done it. She did not admire the effect herself when the coiffure was complete, neither did she survey her appearance complacently when she had gotten into her best brown cashmere dress, with its ruffle of starched lace in the neck. But it did not occur to her that any change could be made for the better. It was her best dress, and it was the way she did up her hair. She did not like either, but the simple facts of them ended the matter for her.

After the same fashion she regarded her own lot in life, with a sort of resigned disapproval.

On account of her mother's ill health, she had been incumbered for the last five years with the numberless social duties to which the wife of a poor country minister is liable. She had been active in Sunday-school picnics and church sociables, in mission bands and neighborhood prayer-meetings. She was a church member, and a good girl, but the *role* did not suit her. Still she accepted it as inevitable, and would no more have thought of evading it than she would have thought of evading life altogether. There was about her an almost stubborn steadfastness of onward movement that would forever keep her in the same rut, no matter how disagreeable it might be, unless some influence outside of herself might move her.

When she went down-stairs she found her mother seated beside the sitting-room stove, also arrayed in her best—a shiny black silk, long in the shoulder seams, the tops of the sleeves adorned with pointed caps trimmed with black velvet ribbon.

She looked up at Eunice as she entered, a complacent smile on her long, delicate face; she thought her homely, honest-looking daughter charming in her best gown.

A murmur of men's voices came from the next room, whose door was closed.

"Father's got Mr. Wilson in there," explained Mrs. Fairweather, in response to Eunice's inquiring glance. "He came just after you went up-stairs. They've been talking very busily about something. Perhaps Mr. Wilson intends—"

Just at that moment the study door opened and the two men came out, Eunice's father, tall and round-shouldered, with grayish sandy hair and beard, politely allowing his guest to precede him. There was a little resemblance between the two, though there was no relationship. Mr. Wilson was a younger man by ten years; he was shorter and slighter; but he had similarly sandy hair and beard, though they were not quite so gray, and something the same cast of countenance. He was settled over a neighboring parish; he was a widower with four young children; his wife had died a year before.

He had spoken to Mrs. Fairweather on his first entrance, so he stepped directly toward Eunice with extended hand. His ministerial affability was slightly dashed with embarrassment, and his thin cheeks were crimson around the roots of his sandy beard.

Eunice shook the proffered hand with calm courtesy, and inquired after his children. She had not a thought that his embarrassment betokened anything, if indeed she observed it at all.

Her father stood by with an air of awkward readiness to proceed to action, waiting until the two should cease the interchanging of courtesies.

When the expected pause came he himself placed a chair for Mr. Wilson. "Sit down, Brother Wilson," he said, nervously, "and I will consult with my daughter concerning the matter we were speaking of. Eunice, I would like to speak a moment with you in the study."

"Certainly, sir," said Eunice. She looked surprised, but she followed him at once into the study. "Tell me as quickly as you can what it is, father," she said, "for it is nearly time for people to begin coming, and I shall have to attend to them."

She had not seated herself, but stood leaning carelessly against the study wall, questioning her father with her steady eyes.

He stood in his awkward height before her. He was plainly trembling. "Eunice," he said, in a shaking voice, "Mr. Wilson came—to say—he would like to marry you, my dear daughter."

He cleared his throat to hide his embarrassment. He felt a terrible constraint in speaking to Eunice of such matters; he looked shamefaced and distressed.

Eunice eyed him steadily. She did not change color in the least. "I think I would rather remain as I am, father," she said quietly.

Her father roused himself then. "My dear daughter," he said, with restrained eagerness, "don't decide this matter too hastily, without giving it all the consideration it deserves. Mr. Wilson is a good man; he would make you a worthy husband; and he needs a wife sadly. Think what a wide field of action would be before you with those four little motherless children to love and care for! You would have a wonderful opportunity to do good."

"I don't think," said Eunice, bluntly, "that I should care for that sort of an opportunity."

"Then," her father went on, "you will forgive me if I speak plainly, my dear. You—are getting older; you have not had any other visitors. You would be well provided for in this way—"

"Exceedingly well," replied Eunice, slowly. "There would be six hundred a year and a leaky parsonage for a man and woman and four children, and—nobody knows how many more." She was almost coarse in her slow indignation, and did not blush at it.

"The Lord would provide for His servants."

"I don't know whether He would or not. I don't think He would be under any obligation to if His servant deliberately incumbered himself with more of a family than he had brains to support."

Her father looked so distressed that Eunice's heart smote her for her forcible words. "You don't want to get rid of me, surely, father," she said, in a changed tone.

Mr. Fairweather's lips moved uncertainly as he answered: "No, my dear daughter; don't ever let such a thought enter your head. I only—Mr. Wilson is a good man, and a woman is best off married, and your mother and I are old. I have never laid up anything. Sometimes— Maybe I don't trust the Lord enough, but I have felt anxious about you, if anything happened to me." Tears were standing in his light blue eyes, which had never been so steady and keen as his daughter's.

There came a loud peal of the door-bell. Eunice started. "There! I must go," she said. "We'll talk about this another time. Don't worry about it, father dear."

"But, Eunice, what shall I say to him?"

"Must something be said to-night?"

"It would hardly be treating him fairly otherwise."

Eunice looked hesitatingly at her father's worn, anxious face. "Tell him," she said at length, "that I will give him his answer in a week."

Her father looked gratified. "We will take it to the Lord, my dear."

Eunice's lip curled curiously; but she said, "Yes, sir," dutifully, and hastened from the room to answer the door-bell.

The fresh bevies that were constantly arriving after that engaged her whole attention. She could do no more than give a hurried "Good-evening" to Mr. Wilson when he came to take leave, after a second short conference with her father in the study. He looked deprecatingly hopeful.

The poor man was really in a sad case. Six years ago, when he married, he had been romantic. He would never be again. He was not thirsting for love and communion with a kindred spirit now, but for a good, capable woman who would take care of his four clamorous children without a salary.

He returned to his shabby, dirty parsonage that night, with, it seemed to him, quite a reasonable hope that his affairs might soon be changed for the better. Of course he would have preferred that the lady should have said yes directly; it would both have assured him, and shortened the time to when his burdens should be lightened; but he could hardly have expected that, when his proposal was so sudden, and there had been no preliminary attention on his part. The week's probation, therefore, did not daunt him much. He did not really see why Eunice should refuse him. She was plain, was getting older; it probably was her first, and very likely her last, chance of marriage. He was a clergyman in good standing, and she would not lower her social position. He felt sure that he was about to be relieved from the unpleasant predicament in which he had been since hearing of his wife's death, and from which, and being forced to make no effort to extricate himself, for a full year. The truth is, he had been up five days in fact, and had been up five days, too, actually took credit to himself for patience and contentment during those five days. It was rather shocking, but there was a good deal to be said for him. No wife, and four small children, six hundred dollars a year, moderate brain, and an active conscience, are a hard combination of circumstances for any man.

He returned thanks, however, to-night to the Lord for His countless blessings with pious fervor, which would have been lessened had he known of the state of Eunice's mind just at that moment.

The merry company had all departed, the tree stood dismantled in the parlor, and she was preparing for bed, with her head full, not of him, but another man.

Standing before her glass combing out her rather scanty, lustreless hair, her fancy pictured to her, beside her own homely, sober face, another, a man's, blonde and handsome, with a gentle, almost womanish smile on the full red lips, and a dangerous softness in the blue eyes. Could a third person have seen the double picture as she did, he would have been struck with a sense of the incongruity, almost absurdity, of it. Eunice herself, with her hard, uncompromising common-sense, took the attitude of a third person in regard to it, and blew her light out at length, and shut it out, with a bitter amusement in her heart at her own folly.

There had been present that evening a young man who was comparatively a recent acquisition to the village society. He had been in town about three months. His father, two years before, had purchased one of the largest farms in the vicinity, moving there from an adjoining State. This son had been absent at the time; he was reported to be running a cattle ranch in one of those distant Territories which seem almost fabulous to New Englanders. Since he had come home he had been the cynosure of the village. He was thirty and a little over, but he was singularly boyish in his ways, and took part in all the town frolics with gusto. He was popularly supposed to be engaged to Ada Harris, Squire Harris's daughter, as she was often called. Her father was the prominent man of the village, lived in the best house, and had the loudest voice in public matters. He was a lawyer, with rather more pomposity than ability, perhaps, but there had always been money and influence in the Harris family, and these warded off all criticism.

The daughter was a pretty blonde of average attainments, but with keen wits and strong passions. She had not been present at the Christmas tree, and her lover, either on that account, or really from some sudden fancy he had taken to Eunice, had been at her elbow the whole evening. He had a fashion of making his attentions marked: he did on that occasion. He made a pretense of assisting her, but it was only a pretense, and she knew it, though she thought it marvellous. She had met him, but had not exchanged two words with him before. She had seen him with Ada Harris, and he had seemed almost as much out of her life as a lover in a book. Young men of his kind were unknown quantities heretofore to this steady, homely young woman. They seemed to belong to other girls.

So his devotion to her through the evening, and his asking permission to call when he took leave, seemed to her well-nigh incredible. Her head was not turned, in the usual acceptation of the term—it was not an easy head to turn—but it was full of Burr Mason, and every thought, no matter how wide a starting-point it had, lost itself at last in the thought of him.

Mr. Wilson's proposal weighed upon her terribly through the next week. Her father seemed bent upon her accepting it; so did her mother, who sighed in secret over the prospect of her daughter's remaining unmarried. Either through unworldliness, or their conviction of the desirability of the marriage in itself, the meagreness of the financial outlook did not seem to influence them in the least.

Eunice did not once think of Burr Mason as any reason for her reluctance, but when the day but one before her week of probation was up he called, and when, the next day, he took her to drive, she decided on a refusal of the minister's proposal easily enough. She had wavered a little before.

So Mr. Wilson was left to decide upon some other worthy reliable woman as a subject for his addresses, and Eunice kept on with her new lover.

How this sober, conscientious girl could reconcile to herself the course she was now taking was a question. It was probable she did not make the effort; she was so sensible that she would have known its futility and hypocrisy beforehand.

She knew her lover had been engaged to Ada Harris; that she was encouraging him in cruel and dishonourable treatment of another woman; but she kept steadily on. People even came to her and told her that the jilted girl was breaking her heart. She listened, her homely face set in an immovable calm. She listened quietly to her parents' remonstrance, and kept on.

There was an odd quality in Burr Mason's character. He was terribly vacillating, but he knew it. Once he said Eunice, with the careless freedom that would have been almost insolence in another man: "Don't let me see Ada Harris much, I warn you, dear. I mean to be true to you, but she has such a pretty face, and I meant to be true to her, but you have—I don't know just what, but something she has not."

Eunice knew the truth of what he said perfectly. The incomprehensibleness of it all to her, who was so sensible of her own disadvantages, was the fascination she had for such a man.

A few days after Burr Mason had made that remark, Ada Harris came to see her. When Eunice went into the sitting-room to greet her, she kept her quiet, unmoved face, but the change in the girl before her was terrible. It was not wasting of flesh or pallor that it consisted in, but something worse. Her red lips were set so hard that the soft curves in them were lost, her cheeks burned feverishly, her blue eyes had a fierce light in them, and most painful thing of all for another woman to see, she had not crimped her pretty blonde hair, but were it curled straight back from her throbbing forehead.

When Eunice entered, she rushed for no preliminary courtesies, but sprang forward, and caught hold of her hand with a strong nervous grasp, and stood so, her pretty, desperate face confronting Eunice's calm, plain one.

"Eunice!" she cried, "Eunice! why did you take him away from me? Eunice! Eunice!" Her voice broke in a low wail, without any tears.

Eunice released her hand, and chafed her own.

"You had your share before, Ada, you had it in her day, poor thing. What has this to do with him, you and Burr? I suppose I am to blame, for a full year. Oh, Ada, how could you? How could you? I thought you was my friend."

"You ask me why *I* do this and that, but don't you think he had anything to do with it himself?"

Ada stood before her, clinching her little white hands. "Eunice Fairweather, you know Burr Mason, and I know Burr Mason. You know that if you gave him up and refused to see him, he would come back to me. You knew it."

"Yes, I know it."

"You know it; you sit there and say you know it, and yet you do this cruel thing—you, a minister's daughter. You understood from the first how it was. You knew he was mine, that you had no right to him. You knew if you shunned him ever so little, that he would come back to me. And yet you let him come and make love to you. You knew it. There is no excuse for you: you knew it. It is no better for him. You have encouraged him in being false. You have dragged him down. You are a plainer girl than I, and a soberer one, but you are no better. You will not make him a better wife. You cannot make him a good wife after this. It is all for yourself—yourself!"

Eunice sat still.

Then Ada flung herself on her knees at her side, and pleaded, as for her life. "Eunice, oh, Eunice, give him to me. It is killing me. Eunice, dear Eunice, say that you will."

As Eunice sat looking at the poor dishevelled golden head bowed over her lap, a recollection flashed across her mind oddly enough, of a certain recess at the village school they two had attended years ago, when she was among the older girls, and Ada a child to her; how she had played she was her little girl and held her in her lap, and that golden head had nestled on her bosom.

"Eunice, oh, Eunice, he loved me first. You had better have stolen away my own heart. It would not have been so wicked or so cruel. How could you? Oh, Eunice, give him back to me. Eunice, *won't you?*"

"No."

Ada rose, staggering, without another word. She moaned a little to herself as she crossed the room to the door. Eunice accompanied her to the outer door, and said good-by. Ada did not return it. Eunice saw her steady herself by catching hold of the gate as she passed through.

Then she went slowly up stairs to her own room, wrapped herself in a shawl, and lay down on her bed, as she had that Christmas-eve. She was very pale, and there was a strange look, almost of horror, on her face. She stared, as she lay there, at all the familiar objects in the room, but the most common and insignificant of them had a strange and awful look to her. Yet the change was in herself, not in them. The shadow that was over her own soul overshadowed them and perverted her vision. But she felt also almost a fear of all those inanimate objects she was gazing at. They were so many reminders of a better state with her, for she had gazed at them all in her unconscious childhood. She was sickened with horror at their dumb accusations. There was the little glass she had looked at before she had stolen another woman's dearest wealth away from her, the chair she had sat in, the bed she had lain in.

At last Eunice Fairweather's strong will broke down before the accusations of her own conscience, which were so potent as to take upon themselves material shapes.

Ada Harris, in her pretty chamber, lying worn out on her bed, her face buried in the pillow, started at a touch on her shoulder. Some one had stolen into the room unannounced—not her mother, for she was waiting outside. Ada turned her head, and saw Eunice. She struck at her wildly with her slender hands. "Go away!" she screamed.

"Ada!"

"Go away!"

"Burr Mason is down-stairs. I came with him to call on you."

Ada sat upright, staring at her, her hand still uplifted.

"I am going to break my engagement with him."

"Oh, Eunice! Eunice! you blessed—"

Eunice drew the golden head down on her bosom, just as she had on that old school-day.

"Love me all you can, Ada," she aids. "I want—something."

Keep up Your Spirits.

Don't get down in the mouth, man! Don't lose your faith in men and thing just because for a time you have seemed to lose your hold. All broken up it may be you are, and insurance seems to be the best way toward bread-getting and paying the expenses of that little family that are now housed in a flat; but don't you show the white feather. Stick! Up, and at 'em again! The long road must turn, you know. You have been at it quite a good while, and somehow you fail to get your work in, they don't sign applications yet, and you are blue. But keep at it! Pluck and patience must win the day. Then just screw your courage up to the sticking-place, and peg away; and keep on pegging away and on, and on, and on; for there is no good in halting for an instant. It's all nonsense about you not being suited to the business. What you lack is just a little tact, most likely, and that will come to you soon. You have legs and brains, and therefore you can get around and do life insurance business. Having a hard time of it, you say? Yes, but how much harder time would that little woman have without you? Think of it. It will help put you in sympathy with your work; help you build a wall of protection around some other home, to shield when the worker and bread-getter has gone farther along and out of sight on life's road. Don't get blue; but if you must, don't look blue. That will be death to you. Fight against odds with a smiling face, and don't slack, but keep fighting. You will awake some morning to find you have conquered.

"Mary," said Mrs. Snagsby to her maid, "you really must put some more of a dish out on the step to hold the ice, so there won't be a puddle of water left there every morning." "What dish shall I use, mum?" "Anything would do. Suppose you use a tea cup."

Some Definitions.

Wagon.—Sweet oil for human machinery.

Property.—Death in life.

Patronage.—A big boy helping a little boy to raise his kite.

Law.—A trap baited with promises of profit or revenge.

Debt.—The example set by Government to its people.

Prison.—An oven in which society puts a newly made crime to harness.

Taxes.—Periodical bleeding, as prescribed by Government.

Congress.—Men assembled to prevent each other from doing anything.

Experience.—Life's daybook.

Soldier.—A target set up by one nation for another to shoot at.

Revenge.—The only debt it is wrong to pay.

Dinner.—The breakfast of the poor and the supper of the rich.

Luxury.—The labor of the wealthy.

Pawnbroker.—The man who holds your coat while you fight.

Miser.—One who makes bricks that his heirs may build houses.

Tobacco.—One whose life is consumed in establishing its character.

Time.—To the aged an atom; to the young a world.

Poetry.—Thought in blossom.

Ireland.—The Actæon of nations, torn to pieces by its own dogs.

Bachelor.—A wild goose that tame geese envy.

Family.—Matrimony doing penance.

Marriage.—The only lottery not paid down.

Child.—The future in the present.

Coat.—The scabbard that offers no guarantee for the blade it sheathes.

Theatre.—Nature in the "House of Correction."

Ink.—The Black Sea on which Thought rides at anchor.

TRACKING HIS MOTHER'S MURDERER.

A Young Polander's Faithful Watch and Prospective Revenge.

Fourteen years ago Joseph Comoski, father died in Poland, leaving a snug estate to Joseph Comoski, Jr., his sister, and the children's mother. The hours of mourning had scarcely passed when Michael Shaw turned his eyes upon Miss Comoski. He wooed and won. To possess the estate became his unholy ambition. The will stood in the way of the successful accomplishment of his foul object. He meditated and finally determined to resort to the means for the removal of his obstacle.

One morning the little Polish village was excited as it had never been before. Some one during the hour of sleep had foully murdered Widow Comoski. Suspicion at once attached itself to the son-in-law. Pursued by the law and a guilty conscience he fled from the land of his birth, across the ocean and found employment in the mines of Pennsylvania. Here he considered himself secure.

Joseph Comoski, Jr., though but a boy of 14 years, swore solemnly to avenge his mother's death, even should the murderer seek the most distant spot on earth. In pursuance of this resolve he bade a tearful adieu to his betrayed sister and sailed for America. Fortune favored the brave youth and after a time he discovered his mother's murderer in Pottsville. He at once made known his discovery to the Polish Consul in New York and acquainted him with all the facts in the case. The sympathy of the official was enlisted in the boy's behalf and he promised his assistance. The boy kept a watch over the murderer's doings, tracking him from town to town. Finally the fugitive was apprehended while engaged in the commission of a robbery and sent to the Philadelphia penitentiary for a term of three years. The consul, in the meantime, had written to Poland and learned of the correctness of the boy's story. He then secured the extradition papers, and then came to Mount Carmel, where so many of his countrymen reside, to work while the three years were passing. He found employment at the Pennsylvania colliery as an ash-wheeler. By his industrious habits he gained the good will of his bosses, and was finally promoted foreman, a position which he now satisfactorily fills.

The young man is scrupulously careful in saving his earnings, and it was a knowledge of this, followed by an inquiry from an official, that led to a recital of the above facts. The young man has succeeded in keeping his secret from his countrymen, and this account will probably be to them startling. He has collected a snug sum by his economical habits, and, with fire in his eye, one day this week remarked to our informant that upon the completion of the murderer's term of imprisonment the extradition papers would meet him in the face and the villain should swing from a Polish gallows if it took every cent he earned at the Pennsylvania colliery.—Mount Carmel *News*.

True Appreciation.

The observation of a great writer on receiving half a dozen bottles of brandy sent him by an anonymous admirer is well known. "This," he said with complacency, "is fame." For my part, as is only in accordance with the rules of proportion, I have had to be content with much inferior liquor—mere ginger beer, a drink which is effervescent no doubt, but while it lasts is refreshing enough. I once lost a Persian cat which (I had almost written "who,") was very dear to me, and went to a subtle police office for professional advice and hand-bills and rewards. "What is the name, Sir?" inquired the intelligent Inspector. (It is cynically observed that Inspectors are always called in the newspapers "intelligent;" but this one, as will be fully deserved the title.) As my loss was a lawful one, I of course gave him alias. "James Payn?" he echoed. "Are you the story teller?" I modestly admitted that I was. "Then I tell you what," he said, in a tone in which generosity and gratitude were finely blended, "you are out of my district, but I'll take this for nothing." And he took it. That was my brandy. I have also had sums of money borrowed of me at various times by admirers of my genius—but that has given me less satisfaction.—*James Payn, in the Cornhill Magazine.*