

## After the Storm

### Weary of Constraint

By Timothy Shay Arthur

1868

#### Chapter 16.

Time moved on, and Irene's intimate city friends were those to whom she had been introduced, directly or indirectly, through Mrs. Talbot. Of these, the one who had most influence over her was Mrs. Lloyd, and that influence was not of the right kind. Singularly enough, it so happened that Hartley never met this lady at his house, though she spent hours there every week; and, more singular still, Irene had never spoken about her to her husband. She had often been on the point of doing so — but an impression that Hartley would take up an unreasonable prejudice against her, kept the name of this friend back from her lips.

Months now followed each other without the occurrence of events marked by special interest. Hartley grew more absorbed in his profession as cases multiplied on his hands; and Irene, interested in her circle of bright-minded, independent-thinking women, found the days and weeks gliding on pleasantly enough. But habits of estimating things a little differently from the common sentiment, and *views of life* not by any means consonant with those prevailing among the larger numbers of her gender — were gradually taking root.

Young, inexperienced, self-willed and active in mind, Irene had most unfortunately been introduced among a class of people whose *influence* upon her could not fail to be hurtful. Their conversation was mainly of art, literature, social progress and development; the drama, music, public sentiment on leading topics of the day; the advancement of *liberal* ideas, the necessity of a larger *liberty* and a wider sphere of action for woman, and the *equality* of the sexes. All well enough, all to be commended when viewed in their just relation to other themes and interests — but actually *pernicious* when separated from the homely and useful things of daily life, and made so to overshadow these as to warp them into comparative insignificance. Here lay the evil. It was this elevation of her ideas above the region of *use* and *duty* — into the mere *aesthetic* and *reformatory* that was hurtful to one like Irene — that is, in fact, hurtful to any woman; for it is always hurtful to take away from the mind its interest in common life — the life, we mean, of *daily useful work*.

*Work!* We know the word has not a pleasant sound to many ears, that it seems to include *degradation*, and a kind of *social slavery*, and lies away down in a region to which your fine, cultivated, intellectual woman cannot descend without, in her view, *soiling her garments*. But for all this, it is alone in *daily useful work* of mind or hands, work in which service and benefits to others are involved — that a woman (or a man) gains any true perfection of character. And this work must be her own, must lie within the sphere of her own relations to others, and she must engage in it from a sense of duty that takes its promptings from her own consciousness of *right*. No *other* woman can judge of her relation to this work, and she who dares to interfere or turn her aside, should be considered an enemy — not a friend.

No wonder, if this be true, that we have so many women of taste, cultivation, and often brilliant intellectual powers — blazing about like comets or shooting stars in our social firmament. They attract admiring attention, excite our wonder, give us themes for conversation and criticism; but as guides and indicators while we sail over the dangerous sea of life — what are they in comparison with some humble star of the sixth magnitude that ever keeps its true place in the heavens, shining on with its small but steady ray, a perpetual blessing?

And so the patient, thoughtful, loving wife and mother, doing her daily work for human souls and bodies — though her intellectual powers may be humble, and her taste but poorly cultivated — fills more honorably her sphere, than any of her more brilliant sisters, who cast off what they consider the *shackles* by which custom and tyranny have bound them down to mere *home duties* and the *drudgery* of household care. If down into these they would bring their superior powers, their cultivated tastes, their larger knowledge — how quickly would some *desert* homes in our land put on refreshing greenness; and desolate gardens blossom like the rose! We would have, instead of vast *imaginary Utopias* in the future — model homes in the present — the light and beauty of which, shining abroad, would give higher types of social life for common emulation.

Ah, if the *Genius of Social Reform* would only take her stand centrally! If she would make the renewal of homes the great achievement of our day — then would she indeed come with promise and blessing. But, alas! she is so far vagrant in her habits — a fortune-telling gipsy — not a true, loving, useful woman.

Unhappily for Irene, it was the weird-eyed, fortune-telling gipsy, whose philosophic utterances had bewildered her mind.

The reconciliation which followed the Christmas-time troubles of Irene and her husband, had given both more prudent self-control. They guarded themselves with a care that threw around the manner of each, a certain *reserve* — which was often felt by the other as *coldness*. To both this was, in a degree, painful. There

was tender love in their hearts — but it was overshadowed by *self-will* and false ideas of *independence* on the one side; and by a brooding spirit of accusation and unaccustomed restraint on the other. Many times, each day of their lives, did words and sentiments, just about to be uttered by Hartley, die unspoken, lest in them something might appear which would stir the quick feelings of Irene into antagonism.

There was no guarantee of happiness in such a state of things. *Mutual forbearance* existed, not from self-discipline and tender love — but from *fear of consequences*. They were both *burnt children*, and dreaded, as well they might, the fire!

With little change in their relations to each other, and few events worthy of notice, a year went by. Mr. Delancy came down to New York several times during this period, spending a few days at each visit, while Irene went frequently to Ivy Cliff, and stayed there, occasionally, as long as two or three weeks. Hartley always came up from the city while Irene was at her father's — but never stayed longer than a single day, business requiring him to be at his office or in court.

Mr. Delancy never saw them together without closely observing their manner, tone of speaking and language. Both, he could see, were maturing rapidly. Irene had changed most. There was a style of thinking, a familiarity with popular themes and a *womanly confidence* in her expression of opinions, that at times surprised him. With her views on some subjects, his own mind was far from being in agreement, and they often had warm arguments. Occasionally, when her husband was at Ivy Cliff — a difference of sentiment would arise between them. Mr. Delancy noticed, when this was the case, that Irene always pressed her view with ardor — and that her husband, after a brief but pleasant combat, retired from the field. He also noticed that in most cases, after this giving up of the contest by Hartley — he was more than usually quiet and seemed to be pondering things not wholly agreeable.

Mr. Delancy was gratified to see that there was no harsh jarring between them. But he failed not at the same time to notice something else that gave him uneasiness. The warmth of feeling, the tenderness, the lover-like ardor which displayed itself in the beginning — no longer existed. They did not even show that fondness for each other which is so beautiful a trait in young married partners. And yet he could trace no signs of *alienation*. The truth was, the action of their lives had been *inharmonious*. Deep down in their hearts, there was no defect of love. But this love was compelled to hide itself away; and so, for the most part, it lay concealed from even their own consciousness.

During the second year of their married life there came a change of state in both Irene and her husband. They had each grown weary of *constraint* when together. It was irksome to be always *on guard*, lest some word, tone or act should be misunderstood. In consequence, old *conflicts* were renewed, and Hartley often

grew impatient and even contemptuous toward his wife, when she ventured to speak of social progress, woman's rights, or any of the kindred themes in which she still took a warm interest. *Angry retort* usually followed on these occasions, and periods of *coldness* ensued, the effect of which was to produce states of alienation.

If a babe had come to soften the heart of Irene, to turn thought and feeling in a new direction, to awaken a mother's love with all its holy tenderness — how different would all have been! — different with her, and different with him. There would then have been an object on which both could center interest and affection, and thus draw lovingly together again, and feel, as in the beginning, heart beating to heart in sweet accordings. They would have learned their love-lessons over again, and understood their meanings better. Alas that the *angels of infancy* found no place in their dwelling!

With no *central attraction* at home, her thoughts stimulated by association with a class of intellectual, restless women, who were wandering on life's broad desert, in search of green places and refreshing springs, each day's journey bearing them *farther and farther* away from landscapes of perpetual verdure — Irene grew more and more interested in subjects that lay for the most part entirely out of the range of her husband's sympathies; while he was becoming more deeply absorbed in a profession that required close application of thought, intellectual force and clearness, and cold, practical modes of looking at all questions that came up for consideration.

The consequence was that they were, in all their common interests, modes of *thinking* and habits of regarding the affairs of life — steadily *receding* from each other. Their evenings were now less frequently spent together. If home had been a pleasant place to him, Hartley would have usually remained at home after the day's duties were over; or, if he went abroad, it would have been usually in company with his wife. But home was getting to be *dull*, if not positively *disagreeable*. If a conversation was started — it soon involved *disagreement* in sentiment, and then came *argument*, and perhaps ungentle words, followed by silence and a mutual writing down of *bitter things* in their minds. If there was no conversation, Irene buried herself in a book — some absorbing novel, usually of the *progressive thought* school.

Naturally, under this state of things, Hartley, who was social in disposition, sought companionship elsewhere, and with his own gender. Brought into contact with men of different tastes, feelings and habits of thinking, he gradually selected a few as intimate friends, and, in association with these, formed, as his wife was doing, a social point of interest *outside* of his home; thus widening still further the space between them.

The home duties involved in housekeeping, *indifferently* as they had always been discharged by Irene — were now becoming more and more *distasteful* to her.

This daily care about mere eating and drinking, seemed unworthy of a woman who had noble aspirations, such as burned in her breast. That was work for *women-drudges* who had no higher ambition; "and Heaven knows," she would often say to herself, "there are enough and to spare of these drones!"

"What's the use of keeping up an establishment like this, just for two people?" she would often remark to her husband; and he would usually reply,

"For the sake of having a home into which one may retire and shut out the world."

Irene would sometimes suggest the lighter expense of renting.

"If it cost twice as much, I would prefer to live in my own house," was the invariable answer.

"But see what a burden of *care* it lays on my shoulders."

Now Hartley could only with difficulty repress a word of impatient rebuke when this argument was used. He thought of his own daily devotion to business, prolonged often into the night, when an important case was on hand, and mentally charged his wife with a *selfish love of ease*. On the other hand, it seemed to Irene that her husband was selfish in wishing her to bear the burdens of housekeeping, just for his pleasure or convenience — when they might live as comfortably in a boarding-house.

On this subject Hartley would not enter into a discussion. "It's no use talking, Irene," he would say, when she grew in earnest. "You cannot tempt me to give up my home. It includes many things that with me are essential to comfort. I detest boarding-houses; they are only places for *sojourning*, not *living*."

As agreement on this subject was out of the question, Irene did not usually urge considerations in favor of abandoning their pleasant home.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).