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# **Home Lights and Shadows**

T. S. (Timothy Shay) Arthur

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# HOME LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

BY

T. S. ARTHUR

AUTHOR OF "LIFE PICTURES," "OLD MAN'S BRIDE,"  
AND "SPARING TO SPEND."

NEW YORK  
1853



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## PREFACE.

HOME! How at the word, a crowd of pleasant thoughts awaken. What sun-bright images are pictured to the imagination. Yet, there is no home without its shadows as well as sunshine. Love makes the home-lights and selfishness the shadows. Ah! how dark the shadow at times—how faint and fleeting the sunshine. How often selfishness towers up to a giant height, barring out from our dwellings every golden ray. There are few of us, who do not, at times, darken with our presence the homes that should grow bright at our coming. It is sad to acknowledge this; yet, in the very acknowledgement is a promise of better things, for, it is rarely that we confess, without a resolution to overcome the evil that mars our own and others' happiness. Need we say, that the book now presented to the reader is designed to aid in the work of overcoming what is evil and selfish, that home-lights may dispel home-shadows, and keep them forever from our dwellings.



## RIGHTS AND WRONGS.

IT is a little singular—yet certainly true—that people who are very tenacious of their own rights, and prompt in maintaining them, usually have rather vague notions touching the rights of others. Like the too eager merchant, in securing their own, they are very apt to get a little more than belongs to them.

Mrs. Barbara Uhler presented a notable instance of this. We cannot exactly class her with the "strong-minded" women of the day. But she had quite a leaning in that direction; and if not very strong-minded herself, was so unfortunate as to number among her intimate friends two or three ladies who had a fair title to the distinction.

Mrs. Barbara Uhler was a wife and a mother. She was also a woman; and her consciousness of this last named fact was never indistinct, nor ever unmingled with a belligerent appreciation of the rights appertaining to her sex and position.

As for Mr. Herman Uhler, he was looked upon, abroad, as a mild, reasonable, good sort of a man. At home, however, he was held in a very different estimation. The "wife of his bosom" regarded him as an exacting domestic tyrant; and, in opposing his will, she only fell back, as she conceived, upon the first and most sacred law of her nature. As to "obeying" him, she had scouted that idea from the beginning. The words, "honor and obey," in the marriage service, she had always declared, would have to be omitted when she stood at the altar. But as she had, in her maidenhood, a very strong liking for the handsome young Mr. Uhler, and, as she could not obtain so material a change in the church ritual, as the one needed to meet her case, she wisely made a virtue of necessity, and went to the altar with her lover. The difficulty was reconciled to her own conscience by a mental reservation.

It is worthy of remark that above all other of the obligations here solemnly entered into, this one, *not* to honor and obey her husband, ever after remained prominent in the mind of Mrs. Barbara Uhler. And it was no fruitless sentiment, as Mr. Herman Uhler could feelingly testify.

From the beginning it was clearly apparent to Mrs. Uhler that her husband expected too much from her; that he regarded her as a kind of upper servant in his household, and that he considered himself as having a right to complain if things were not orderly and comfortable. At first, she met his looks or words of displeasure, when his meals, for instance, were late, or so badly cooked as to be unhealthy and unpalatable, with—

"I'm sorry, dear; but I can't help it."

"Are you sure you can't help it, Barbara?" Mr. Uhler at length ventured to ask, in as mild a tone of voice as his serious feelings on the subject would enable him to assume.

Mrs. Uhler's face flushed instantly, and she answered, with dignity:

"I *am* sure, Mr. Uhler."

It was the first time, in speaking to her husband, that she had said "Mr. Uhler," in her life the first time she had ever looked at him with so steady and defiant an aspect.

Now, we cannot say how most men would have acted under similar circumstances; we can only record what Mr. Uhler said and did:

"And I am *not* sure, Mrs. Uhler," was his prompt, impulsive reply, drawing himself up, and looking somewhat sternly at his better half.

"You are not?" said Mrs. Uhler; and she compressed her lips tightly.

"I am not," was the emphatic response.

"And what do you expect me to do, pray?" came next from the lady's lips.

"Do as I do in my business," answered the gentleman. "Have competent assistance, or see that things are done right yourself."

"Go into the kitchen and cook the dinner, you mean, I suppose?"

"You can put my meaning into any form of words you please, Barbara. You have charge of this household, and it is your place to see that everything due to the health and comfort of its inmates is

properly cared for. If those to whom you delegate so important a part of domestic economy as the preparation of food, are ignorant or careless, surely it is your duty to go into the kitchen daily, and see that it is properly done. I never trust wholly to any individual in my employment. There is no department of the business to which I do not give personal attention. Were I to do so my customers would pay little regard to excuses about ignorant workmen and careless clerks. They would soon seek their goods in another and better conducted establishment."

"Perhaps you had better seek your dinners elsewhere, if they are so little to your fancy at home."

This was the cool, defiant reply of the outraged Mrs. Uhler.

Alas, for Mr. Herman Uhler; he had, so far as his wife was concerned, committed the unpardonable sin; and the consequences visited upon his transgression were so overwhelming that he gave up the struggle in despair. Contention with such an antagonist, he saw, from the instinct of self-preservation, would be utterly disastrous. While little was to be gained, everything was in danger of being lost.

"I have nothing more to say," was his repeated answer to the running fire which his wife kept up against him for a long time. "You are mistress of the house; act your own pleasure. Thank you for the suggestion about dinner. I may find it convenient to act thereon."

The last part of this sentence was extorted by the continued irritating language of Mrs. Uhler. Its utterance rather cooled the lady's indignant ardor, and checked the sharp words that were rattling from her tongue. A truce to open warfare was tacitly agreed upon between the parties. The antagonism was not, however, the less real. Mrs. Uhler knew that her husband expected of her a degree of personal attention to household matters that she considered degrading to her condition as a wife; and, because he *expected* this, she, in order to maintain the dignity of her position, gave even less attention to these matters than would otherwise have been the case. Of course, under such administration of domestic affairs, causes for dissatisfaction on the part of Mr. Uhler, were ever in existence. For the most part he bore up under them with commendable patience; but, there were times when weak human nature faltered by the

way—when, from heart-fulness the mouth would speak. This was but to add new fuel to the flame. This only gave to Mrs. Uhler a ground of argument against her husband as an unreasonable, oppressive tyrant; as one of the large class of men who not only regard woman as inferior, but who, in all cases of weak submission, hesitate not to put a foot upon her neck.

Some of the female associates, among whom Mrs. Uhler unfortunately found herself thrown, were loud talkers about woman's rights and man's tyranny; and to them, with a most unwife-like indelicacy of speech, she did not hesitate to allude to her husband as one of the class of men who would trample upon a woman if permitted to do so. By these ladies she was urged to maintain her rights, to keep ever in view the dignity and elevation of her sex, and to let man, the tyrant, know, that a time was fast approaching when his haughty pride would be humbled to the dust.

And so Mrs. Uhler, under this kind of stimulus to the maintenance of her own rights against the imaginary aggressions of her husband, trampled upon his rights in numberless ways.

As time wore on, no change for the better occurred. A woman does not reason to just conclusions, either from facts or abstract principles like man; but takes, for the most part, the directer road of perception. If, therefore her womanly instincts are all right, her conclusions will be true; but if they are wrong, false judgment is inevitable. The instincts of Mrs. Uhler were wrong in the beginning, and she was, in consequence, easily led by her associates, into wrong estimates of both her own and her husband's position.

One day, on coming home to dinner, Mr. Uhler was told by a servant, that his wife had gone to an anti-slavery meeting, and would not get back till evening, as she intended dining with a friend. Mr. Uhler made no remark on receiving this information. A meagre, badly-cooked dinner was served, to which he seated himself, alone, not to eat, but to chew the cud of bitter fancies. Business, with Mr. Uhler, had not been very prosperous of late; and he had suffered much from a feeling of discouragement. Yet, for all this, his wife's demands for money, were promptly met—and she was not inclined to be over careful as to the range of her expenditures.

There was a singular expression on the face of Mr. Uhler, as he left his home on that day. Some new purpose had been formed in his mind, or some good principle abandoned. He was a changed man—changed for the worse, it may well be feared.

It was late in the afternoon when Mrs. Uhler returned. To have inquired of the servant whether Mr. Uhler had made any remark, when he found that she was absent at dinner time, she would have regarded as a betrayal to that personage of a sense of accountability on her part. No; she stooped not to any inquiry of this kind—compromised not the independence of the individual.

The usual tea hour was at hand—but, strange to say, the punctual Mr. Uhler did not make his appearance. For an hour the table stood on the floor, awaiting his return, but he came not. Then Mrs. Uhler gave her hungry, impatient little ones their suppers—singularly enough, she had no appetite for food herself—and sent them to bed.

Never since her marriage had Mrs. Uhler spent so troubled an evening as that one proved to be. A dozen times she rallied herself—a dozen times she appealed to her independence and individuality as a woman, against the o'er-shadowing concern about her husband, which came gradually stealing upon her mind. And with this uncomfortable feeling were some intruding and unwelcome thoughts, that in no way stimulated her self-approval.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Mr. Uhler came home; and then he brought in his clothes such rank fumes of tobacco, and his breath was so tainted with brandy, that his wife had no need of inquiry as to where he had spent his evening. His countenance wore a look of vacant unconcern.

"Ah! At home, are you?" said he, lightly, as he met his wife. "Did you have a pleasant day of it?"

Mrs. Uhler was—frightened—shall we say? We must utter the word, even though it meet the eyes of her "strong minded" friends, who will be shocked to hear that one from whom they had hoped so much, should be frightened by so insignificant a creature as a husband. Yes, Mrs. Uhler was really frightened by this new aspect in which her husband presented himself. She felt that she was in a

dilemma, to which, unhappily, there was not a single horn, much less choice between two.

We believe Mrs. Uhler did not sleep very well during the night. Her husband, however, slept "like a log." On the next morning, her brow was overcast; but his countenance wore a careless aspect. He chatted with the children at the breakfast table, goodnaturedly, but said little to his wife, who had penetration enough to see that he was hiding his real feelings under an assumed exterior.

"Are you going to be home to dinner to-day?" said Mr. Uhler, carelessly, as he arose from the table. He had only sipped part of a cup of bad coffee.

"Certainly I am," was the rather sharp reply. The question irritated the lady.

"You needn't on my account," said Mr. Uhler. "I've engaged to dine at the Astor with a friend."

"Oh, very well!" Mrs. Uhler bridled and looked dignified. Yet, her flashing eyes showed that cutting words were ready to leap from her tongue. And they would have come sharply on the air, had not the manner of her husband been so unusual and really mysterious. In a word, a vague fear kept her silent.

Mr. Uhler went to his store, but manifested little of his usual interest and activity. Much that he had been in the habit of attending to personally, he delegated to clerks. He dined at the Astor, and spent most of the afternoon there, smoking, talking, and drinking. At tea-time he came home. The eyes of Mrs. Uhler sought his face anxiously as he came in. There was a veil of mystery upon it, through which her eyes could not penetrate. Mr. Uhler remained at home during the evening, but did not seem to be himself. On the next morning, as he was about leaving the house, his wife said —

"Can you let me have some money to-day?"

Almost for the first time in her life, Mrs. Uhler asked this question in a hesitating manner; and, for the first time, she saw that her request was not favorably received.

"How much do you want?" inquired the husband.

"I should like to have a hundred dollars," said Mrs. Uhler.

"I'm sorry; but I can't let you have it," was answered. "I lost five hundred dollars day before yesterday through the neglect of one of my clerks, while I was riding out with some friends."

"Riding out!" exclaimed Mrs. Uhler.

"Yes. You can't expect me to be always tied down to business. I like a little recreation and pleasant intercourse with friends as much as any one. Well, you see, a country dealer, who owed me five hundred dollars, was in the city, and promised to call and settle on the afternoon of day before yesterday. I explained to one of my clerks what he must do when the customer came in, and, of course, expected all to be done right. Not so, however. The man, when he found that he had my clerk, and not me, to deal with, objected to some unimportant charge in his bill, and the foolish fellow, instead of yielding the point, insisted that the account was correct. The customer went away, and paid out all his money in settling a bill with one of my neighbors. And so I got nothing. Most likely, I shall lose the whole account, as he is a slippery chap, and will, in all probability, see it to be his interest to make a failure between this and next spring. I just wanted that money to-day. Now I shall have to be running around half the morning to make up the sum I need."

"But how could you go away under such circumstances, and trust all to a clerk?" said Mrs. Uhler warmly, and with reproof in her voice.

"How could I!" was the quick response. "And do you suppose I am going to tie myself down to the store like a slave! You are mistaken if you do; that is all I have to say! I hire clerks to attend to my business."

"But suppose they are incompetent? What then?" Mrs. Uhler was very earnest.

"That doesn't in the least alter my character and position." Mr. Uhler looked his wife fixedly in the face for some moments after saying this, and then retired from the house without further remark.

The change in her husband, which Mrs. Uhler at first tried to make herself believe was mere assumption or caprice, proved, unhappily, a permanent state. He neglected his business and his home for social companions; and whenever asked by his wife for supplies

of cash, invariably gave as a reason why he could not supply her want, the fact of some new loss of custom, or money, in consequence of neglect, carelessness, or incompetency of clerks or workmen, when he was away, enjoying himself.

For a long time, Mrs. Uhler's independent spirit struggled against the humiliating necessity that daily twined its coils closer and closer around her. More and more clearly did she see, in her husband's wrong conduct, a reflection of her own wrong deeds in the beginning. It was hard for her to acknowledge that she had been in error—even to herself. But conviction lifted before her mind, daily, its rebuking finger, and she could not shut the vision out.

Neglect of business brought its disastrous consequences. In the end there was a failure; and yet, to the end, Mr. Uhler excused his conduct on the ground that he wasn't going to tie himself down like a galley slave to the oar—wasn't going to stoop to the drudgery he had employed clerks to perform. This was all his wife could gain from him in reply to her frequent remonstrances.

Up to this time, Mr. Uhler had resisted the better suggestions which, in lucid intervals, if we may so call them, were thrown into her mind. Pride would not let her give to her household duties that personal care which their rightful performance demanded; the more particularly, as, in much of her husband's conduct, she plainly saw rebuke.

At last, poverty, that stern oppressor, drove the Uhlers out from their pleasant home, and they shrunk away into obscurity, privation, and want. In the last interview held by Mrs. Uhler with the "strong minded" friends, whose society had so long thrown its fascinations around her, and whose views and opinions had so long exercised a baleful influence over her home, she was urgently advised to abandon her husband, whom one of the number did not hesitate to denounce in language so coarse and disgusting, that the latent instincts of the wife were shocked beyond measure. Her husband was not the brutal, sensual tyrant this refined lady, in her intemperate zeal, represented him. None knew the picture to be so false as Mrs. Uhler, and all that was good and true in her rose up in indignant rebellion.

To her poor, comfortless home, and neglected children, Mrs. Uhler returned in a state of mind so different from anything she had experienced for years, that she half wondered within herself if she were really the same woman. Scales had fallen suddenly from her eyes, and she saw every thing around her in new aspects and new relations.

"Has my husband really been an exacting tyrant?" This question she propounded to herself almost involuntarily. "Did he trample upon my rights in the beginning, or did I trample upon his? He had a right to expect from me the best service I could render, in making his home comfortable and happy. Did I render that service? did I see in my home duties my highest obligation as a wife? have I been a true wife to him?"

So rapidly came these rebuking interrogations upon the mind of Mrs. Uhler, that it almost seemed as if an accuser stood near, and uttered the questions aloud. And how did she respond? Not in self justification. Convinced, humbled, repentant, she sought her home.

It was late in the afternoon, almost evening, when Mrs. Uhler passed the threshold of her own door. The cry of a child reached her ears the moment she entered, and she knew, in an instant, that it was a cry of suffering, not anger or ill nature. Hurrying to her chamber, she found her three little ones huddled together on the floor, the youngest with one of its arms and the side of its face badly burned in consequence of its clothes having taken fire. As well as she could learn, the girl in whose charge she had left the children, and who, in the reduced circumstances of the family, was constituted doer of all work, had, from some pique, gone away in her absence. Thus left free to go where, and do what they pleased, the children had amused themselves in playing with the fire. When the clothes of the youngest caught in the blaze of a lighted stick, the two oldest, with singular presence of mind, threw around her a wet towel that hung near, and thus saved her life.

"Has your father been home?" asked Mrs. Uhler, as soon as she comprehended the scene before her.

"Yes, ma'am," was answered.

"Where is he?"

"He's gone for the doctor," replied the oldest of the children.

"What did he say?" This question was involuntary. The child hesitated for a moment, and then replied artlessly —

"He said he wished we had no mother, and then he'd know how to take care of us himself."

The words came with the force of a blow. Mrs. Uhler staggered backwards, and sunk upon a chair, weak, for a brief time, as an infant. Ere yet her strength returned, her husband came in with a doctor. He did not seem to notice her presence; but she soon made that apparent. All the mother's heart was suddenly alive in her. She was not over officious—had little to say; but her actions were all to the purpose. In due time, the little sufferer was in a comfortable state and the doctor retired.

Not a word had, up to this moment, passed between the husband and wife. Now, the eyes of the latter sought those of Mr. Uhler; but there came no answering glance. His face was sternly averted.

Darkness was now beginning to fall, and Mrs. Uhler left her husband and children, and went down into the kitchen. The fire had burned low; and was nearly extinguished. The girl had not returned; and, from what Mrs. Uhler gathered from the children would not, she presumed, come back to them again. It mattered not, however; Mrs. Uhler was in no state of mind to regard this as a cause of trouble. She rather felt relieved by her absence. Soon the fire was rekindled; the kettle simmering; and, in due time, a comfortable supper was on the table, prepared by her own hands, and well prepared too.

Mr. Uhler was a little taken by surprise, when, on being summoned to tea, he took his place at the usually uninviting table, and saw before him a dish of well made toast, and a plate of nicely boiled ham. He said nothing; but a sensation of pleasure, so warm that it made his heart beat quicker, pervaded his bosom; and this was increased, when he placed the cup of well made, fragrant tea to his lips, and took a long delicious draught. All had been prepared by the hands of his wife—that he knew. How quickly his pleasure sighed itself away, as he remembered that, with her ample ability to