

THE LITERARY GARLAND,

AND

British North American Magazine.

VOL. VII.

JUNE, 1849.

No. 6.

FLORENCE; OR, WIT AND WISDOM.*

BY R. E. M.

CHAPTER XI.

In compliance with the Earl of St. Albans' wishes, and to avoid the imputation of singularity, Nina generally made her appearance in the saloon during the evening, and it was indeed a trial to her, for in the midst of the thoughtless gaiety that ever reigned around, she was more lonely, more isolated than in a wilderness. Florence, taken up with Miss Westover, who made it a point to engross her entirely, completely neglected her humble friend, and St. Albans, whatever his generosity and kindness of heart might have been, could not of course devote much time to her. More than once Nina found herself wishing with a sigh, that Percival Clinton would indeed redeem his promise, and make his appearance at the castle. More heartily perhaps than ever did she breathe that wish as she saw the whole party set out one beautiful morning on an exploring expedition, to the ruins of an old abbey in the neighbourhood. Though kindly pressed by her host to join them, she was obliged to decline, as the younger members of the company were going on horseback, and she was no equestrian. She might indeed have taken her place in the comfortable carriage which lady Westover and some other elderly ladies occupied, but her fear of being looked on in the light of an intruder, the mortification of being exposed to their cold indifference, more than counterbalanced any prospects of pleasure the proposed expedition offered. With a heart sad it is true, but totally free from one shade of envy, she watched the gay cavalcade forming, from the window. Florence as usual outshone all others in beauty, her rich colour

heightened by excitement and contrast with the black plumes of her cap, which gracefully drooped over her white brow, mingling with her jetty curls. As the earl, who had just addressed a few courteous words to the occupants of the carriage, was turning to take his place beside Florence, Sir Edward Westover, the brother of her friend, who had arrived the previous evening at the castle, by a clever manoeuvre gained her side, and he immediately entered on a lively dialogue with her. Concealing his annoyance, St. Albans turned to the young lady next him, who seemed in a fair way of being forgotten, and generously resolved to render himself as agreeable to her as her natural apathy and his own diffidence would permit. But this was no easy task. Lady Jacintha Stanton, a pale, insipid girl, with light eyes and flaxen hair, which she was pleased to dignify by the appellation of golden, was a perfect stoic in her way. Nothing short of an offer or a costly gift could call a smile to her lip, or a look of animation to her lifeless features, and St. Albans, betrothed to another, being incapacitated from bestowing either, was of course unworthy any trouble on her part. Most intensely disagreeable and wearisome did she prove to her companion, and ere ten minutes had elapsed, he was thoroughly disgusted with her. Doubly, then, did he feel the deprivation of Florence's gay companionship, and his only consolation was, that she too was doubtless regretting their untoward separation with equal fervour. But this last solace was soon denied him. After a few vain attempts to get up a conversation with lady Jacintha, he relapsed into silence, and was thus at liberty to devote his attention to the proceedings

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