

THE LITERARY GARLAND,

AND

British North American Magazine.

VOL. VII.

SEPTEMBER, 1849.

No. 9.

FLORENCE; OR, WIT AND WISDOM.*

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CHAPTER XVIII.

FLORENCE was now entirely busied in preparations for her approaching nuptials, which were to be celebrated within a month; and in the new and more interesting topics which engrossed her, almost forgot the event of Nina's secret miniature, whose discovery we recorded in our last chapter. Each day beheld some new addition to her splendid wardrobe arriving, or some costly gift from her betrothed, and she lived in a perfect whirl of pleasure and gratified vanity. One morning Fanchette had been unusually busy in conveying parcels and packages to her young lady's dressing room, and Florence herself had paid more than one hurried visit to it. In the afternoon she sought out Nina, and in a mysterious tone requested the latter to accompany her for a few moments to her apartment.

"Now, Nina," she exclaimed, closing the door, "prepare yourself! you will see that long-looked for, long-talked of object, my wedding dress." So saying, she drew her to a recess, where, extended on a couch, lay the splendid robe she had spoken of, in all its costly richness. "Is it not superb, Nina?—will I not look dazzling in it? The lace trimmings alone cost a sum which would make a very good dowry for another bride. And now, look here!" and she raised the light covering from another white robe, of simple though exquisite beauty. "This is for you; you are to be my first bridesmaid. The duke of Wilton's daughter, who is a distant cousin of lord St. Albans, has been soliciting the office, but she is a conceited creature, full of the dignity of her lofty descent. I would prefer you; besides, Sidney is very solicitous, in fact determined that

you shall be elected. Clin'on, of course, will be your cavalier. Is not the dress pretty? I had it made simple, purposely to suit your taste. Now, here is lord St. Albans' gift." She turned to the table, and took from it a casket containing a set of pearls, of great value and beauty. "How well they will look in your jetty hair! Let me try them. Wait, I will fasten the clasp. Turn to the mirror now, and say, are they not charmingly becoming?" Nina complied, but smilingly shook her head, murmuring:

"I fear they only render a plain face still plainer. In gratitude, though, to his lordship, I will thankfully accept his beautiful gifts."

"Yes, and wear them too, Nina. It will be a sort of apprenticeship to the future grandeur awaiting you, to the time fast approaching, when diamonds will flash amid your tresses. You have no longer your old excuse of poverty and dependence to bring forward, betrothed as you now are to one of our highest, wealthiest gentlemen."

"True, Florence, but, even yet, there is uncertainty," returned Nina, the strange expression of melancholy, peculiar to her, suddenly clouding her full dark eyes. "Death, sickness, inconstancy,—oh! many things may intervene—and I have endeavoured, from the first moment this brilliant future opened upon me, to school my heart to meet with sorrow, perhaps disappointment."

"But, my dear girl, where is the use of anticipating grief? 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' You see, I have Scripture for my creed; or, if you prefer it, I'll give you a quotation in your favorite language: '*The present belongs to the wise, l'avenir est aux fous.*' Tell me, though, Nina, how can the exacting, fasti-

* Continued from page 365.