

and so in unison with his sympathies, was one which occasioned him the most exquisite pain, and in the surprise and disappointment of the moment, he passionately exclaimed :

"You will leave me then ! leave me forever ! you, who have opened a new existence to my enjoyment, and in whose presence I have almost learned to forget the hated ties which bind me to one, with whom my heart can know no fellowship !"

Mary grew pale at this abrupt avowal of feelings, whose existence she had never till that moment suspected ; but she replied with admirable composure, and a dignity of manner chastened by native gentleness,

"Surely in thus addressing me, your majesty compromises your princely honour,—forgets what is due to the delicacy of my situation, and what you owe to that exemplary princess whose virtues entitle her to your entire respect and affection. For myself, were not my purpose firmly fixed before, your grace must be aware that I could hesitate no longer."

"Nay punish me not beyond endurance for this my first offence," exclaimed the king, in a voice of deep emotion ; "if I have dared to love, it has been humbly and at a distance, even as the poor idolator, who in reverent silence worships the bright luminary from whose effulgent rays he derives the light, and joy and hope of his existence. Depart not then, and I will speak to you as I have ever done till now, in the cold, calm, passionless accents of friendship and respect."

"It cannot be," said Mary, agitated and offended ; "I have no longer a choice, and it behooves me to depart, and that too with speed. For what safeguard have I in the protection of a prince, who has already abused the friendship I professed for him ; and what confidence can I repose in his honour, when in a moment of doubt and desolation, he has voluntarily wounded my pride and my delicacy, by an avowal which I must ever feel myself degraded to have heard ?"

"Madam, I acknowledge the justice of your rebuke," said the penitent and humbled Francis ; "but the fountain which hidden springs have filled to its very brim, must sometimes overflow—yet hear me pledge the word and honour of a prince, that sooner will I forfeit life, than permit my lips so to offend again. Grant me then your pardon, full and free and unconditional, and permit me the happiness of once more occupying a friend's, a brother's place in your affections. This is all I ask—it is all to which I can or dare aspire ; and this, even you, so tremblingly alive to rectitude and virtue, need not fear to grant."

"I do not, cannot fear," she said, her lovely face kindling with animated pleasure,—“and I offer your majesty this hand as a pledge of my returning confidence, my warm unalterable friendship—let all

that may have pained us in the past be buried in oblivion, and the future rivet still closer the bright chain of amity, that has hitherto united us."

Francis, deeply touched by the grace and softness of her manner, received the proffered hand with an air of humble deference, and tremblingly touching its unsullied whiteness with his lips, relinquished with a sigh the beautiful and coveted prize.

"And you will not leave us then ?" he asked timidly, but with an anxious look and voice—"you will remain here at least till I have proved to you the sincerity of my repentance, and won from you some proof of your renewed confidence in my good faith and honour ?"

Mary looked embarrassed and irresolute ; she cast her eyes upon the ground, and a vivid blush overspread her features. Francis read her thoughts, and in trembling agitation awaited her reply ; at length she spoke and her low unsteady voice betokened strong inward emotion.

"I fear," she said, "I cannot comply with your majesty's request, yet believe me when I say, that no lingering doubt of your sincerity, urges me to negative it ; happy should I be to remain under the protection which you graciously proffer me, were there not many, and cogent reasons which render my return to England expedient and advisable. That land is the home of my affections, the scene of my early joys, and there dwell all whom love, or nature, have knit in closest bands to my heart. Your majesty is doubtless aware of the reluctance with which I came to this country, although it was to be invested with the dignity of its queen—but my royal brother persuaded me the alliance was one of consequence to his realm,—his wishes were ever a law to me, and I yielded my consent—the more readily, as at that time some private disappointments, rendered me almost indifferent to my fate. But now, the tie which bound me here is severed—my task is done—my duties all fulfilled, and—and"—she hesitated and her eye sought the ground, as she added—"should my brother sanction my wish, and your majesty no longer oppose it—I would return to England."

Francis understood the cause of her embarrassment, and knew full well what object filled her thoughts, and wooed her, with a thousand fond anticipations, back to her native shores. His tortured feelings almost spurned controul ; and while he hastily traversed the apartment, contending and tumultuous passions fiercely struggled in his breast, but the contest, if a painful, was a brief one and soon the nobler feelings of his nature triumphed. Anxious to atone for the error into which an impetuous passion had betrayed him, he resolved to sacrifice every cherished hope to the happiness of Mary, and lend, if it were needful, all the weight of his influence to bring about the consummation of her wishes. But for the present he dared not trust himself to speak