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FLORENCE; OR, WIT AND WISDOM.*

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CHAPTER XXI.

WE must now turn to Nina for a time, but as Florence is our heroine, it is, perhaps, fitter for us to say a few words previously of her. When the reader last beheld her, she was in solitude and suffering—four years had elapsed since then. The disappointment which had darkened so heavily the dawn of her youth, had not proved eternal, and though a few months of anguish, of wild regret, had been her portion, her elastic spirit soon gained the mastery over her grief. Once launched anew into the dissipation of London life, lord St. Albans was soon entirely forgotten, or, if occasionally remembered, dismissed as a subject which wounded herself alone, awaking regrets only for the rank and station she had lost—not for the lover himself. To sum up in a few words, the changes of years: Florence had grown more beautiful, more worldly, and alas! more satirical than ever. The failing which a watchful vigilance, a determined will to amend, might at one time have subdued, had now strengthened into a second nature, and the time had long gone by, that she thought of conquering her insidious enemy, or even formed a project of amendment. Miss Murray, still the faithful friend and guardian, possessed less influence over her than ever, and the anxieties and cares with which Florence's wilfulness filled her, were tending slowly, but surely, to draw her frail existence to a speedy close. It was, perhaps, her bitterest trial, to see one so nobly endowed as her youthful relative was, so sadly pervert her brightest gifts, and rendering herself, each day, notwithstanding her beauty, talents, and fascinations, more universally dreaded and disliked. The ad-

miration, however, she excited, was still almost unbounded. She was still surrounded by a crowd of unmeaning, worthless flatterers, and that was sufficient for a heart which had known no other feeling of preference or affection since the image of its first and only love had been so harshly effaced from it. Whether that coldness and insensibility yielded in the end to other feelings, time alone can show.

We will now ask our readers to accompany us to the wild and romantic country of Switzerland, and in atonement for the sudden flight we have thus forced upon them, we promise to spare their patience, all prosy descriptions of storms among the "giant Alps," and sunsets upon its broad crystal lakes; wanderings among its vineyards, torrents, and the rest of the long catalogue of Alpine beauties, with which most modern readers, even those who have never stirred beyond the sound of their own Sabbath chimes, are, at least by hear-say, perfectly well acquainted. In Switzerland, then, in one of its wildest districts, night had descended in rain and gloom. The darkness was relieved, but by one solitary ray of light, which streamed from the window of a small inn, by the way-side. The hostel was of the humblest description. It contained but two apartments; the large outer room, in which the hostess was bending over the embers of a fire, and an inner one devoted to the accommodation of those travellers whom curiosity or desperate ennui, had driven to that sequestered spot. In the latter chamber, on a wretched straw pallet, lay a woman buried in a deep, feverish sleep, and whose emaciated countenance, and death-like pallour, told that a repose of a more dreamless nature would soon be hers. At the farthest end

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