

(ORIGINAL.)

THE FIRST BELOVED.

BY E. M. M.

Continued from our last Number.—Conclusion.

Lady Sandford failed not in her appointment. On the day following she came alone, and after farewells, many as if years and distance were to divide them, Alice left her mother's side for the first time, and entered the carriage. The drive to Oakley Abbey was very beautiful, and when the first view of the handsome pile caught her eye, she was transported with delight; the grounds appeared to be most tastefully laid out, with long shady walks, smooth lawns and rich plantations. The numberless exotics which filled the balconies were a new charm to Alice.

"Nor need you fear gathering as many as you like," said Lady Sandford, smiling at her exclamations; "for we have no cross old Davy to chide you here; but I must carry you to my nursery where bloom my favourite blossoms."

On leading her through the rooms to this, Alice could not but admire the cheerful elegant arrangement she beheld, so different to the abode she had just quitted. When she entered the nursery, she was immediately surrounded by four lovely children, who gazed awhile in surprise on the stranger, then ventured to show her their various treasures, consisting of wooden horses without their heads, broken carts, and dolls deprived of their eyes, asking her at the same time innumerable questions.

"I see you will soon become excellent friends," observed Lady Sandford, who looked with maternal pride and affection on the youthful group; "they must not however be suffered to tire you—permit me to show you to your apartment."

On reaching the end of a long gallery, Lady Sandford threw open a door; the room beyond was light and pleasant; in all its arrangements attention to the comfort of her youthful guest had evidently been considered, and as Alice gazed around her she mentally said, "How perfectly happy should I feel if my dear mamma were only with me." When left alone she sat down at the window to enjoy the beautiful prospect without; it seemed as if she had been suddenly carried from some magician's cavern to fairy-land, and her spirits rose in proportion; she could have gazed entranced forever, but the entrance of Lady Sandford's maid to dress her, interrupted her

pleasing meditations. When the duties of the toilette had been performed, Lady Sandford very kindly came to take her down stairs, and appeared much struck with her lovely appearance, attired as she was with the utmost simplicity, her rich golden tresses flowing round her fair brow, and her laughing blue eyes beaming with innocence. On entering the drawing-room, she was presented to Sir Robert Sandford, who welcomed her with the utmost cordiality; she looked for a moment in his face and beheld a countenance expressive of great good nature, though by no means handsome. Several other guests were present, to all of whom Alice was introduced until her cheek became suffused with agitation, on finding herself surrounded by so many strangers. Douglas, she perceived at some distance, amusing himself with the children, but on seeing her approach with his sister, he instantly advanced to meet her, and remained by her side until dinner was announced, when he drew her arm within his and placed himself next her at the table. During the repast, Lady Sandford smilingly repeated the message with which she had been charged by Lady Mactavish to her husband. He was much amused as he observed, "the good lady has a retentive memory, for the misdemeanour occurred last winter, and I remember her following us with two or three of her attendants screaming, 'gang ye're gait frae my premises, ye English loons—else I'll have ye a' put e' the stocks if ye break ane o' my fences wi' your harebrained practices an' abominations.'"

Douglas turned to Alice and smiled, saying "you see you are not the only delinquent."

"And yet I can assure you, with all her eccentricities, my aunt possesses a most kind heart," replied Alice; "no poor person is ever sent from her gate unrelieved—I begin quite to love her."

"You are a loving and a loveable being," murmured Douglas in a low tone. The eyes of Alice fell beneath his as he uttered this; it was the first time he had expressed himself so warmly, and she experienced a tremor at her heart.

In the evening the whole party strolled on the lawn. Douglas knowing that Alice was fond of beau-