

was at length exhausted; and with the calmness of despairing anguish, she dismissed her faithful servant, and with her helpless children wandered forth she knew not whither. Yes; she, the child of affluence, the rightful heiress of untold wealth, the wife of a man descended from a long line of honorable ancestors, the daughter of one whose rank was next to royalty itself, became an alien and a wanderer, and had not where to lay her head. Pride had prevented her from mixing with the kind and generous, though lowly residents of the village; and consequently though among them she was not of them, and when she left them, they felt but little interest in her.

She wandered onward for several days, subsisting on the charity of the cottagers and farmers who resided near the way she had chosen, until she entered a large town, which on enquiry she ascertained to be Windsor, one of the royal residences. Her children were too much fatigued to go farther, and feeling her own strength beginning to fail her, she sought for and at length obtained one humble and comfortless room, where, by incessant toil, she for several years obtained a scanty subsistence for her family. But her health gave way beneath the weight of sorrow, and the pressure of labor, and again she led forth her hapless band, homeless, friendless, to meet the storm of life; but her course did not now lie on the beaten track, the general thoroughfare of man; she sought the deepest recesses of the forest, and laid her down to die; and here removed from human aid, subsisting on the wild fruit, which was scantily yielded by the surrounding shrubbery, she awaited the approach of death. It came at last,—but we have already described the closing scene.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"Mr child! my injured Florence," cried Sir James, bending over her,—how have I wronged thee! and thy mother, and my little ones! how have they drooped beneath the blighting hand of want, when I so fondly thought them sheltered beneath the towers of Talavera castle! This prevented me from recognizing my child, when I looked on her familiar face! and I, who would have gladly pressed thee to my long desolate heart, and guarded thee with a parent's care, have made thee wretched! But thou mayst yet be happy, happy with the object of thy early love, and—"

"Never!" cried the earl vehemently; "never shall the noble line of Fitzmorton, which has passed uncontaminated from generation to generation, since the days of our glorious Richard, so far forget its dignity; and moreover, lord Frede-

rick is now the promised husband of lady Maria Percival!"

"But my father! said his lordship, "you forget that Florence is the grand-child of the duke of Seville, and an alliance with her would reflect honor upon our house; you also forget that the engagement between lady Maria and myself, not strengthened by affection on the part of either, may be easily broken."

"Hear me, Frederick! fulfil your engagement with lady Maria, and the rich treasure of a father's blessing shall be thine; wed Florence Oakley, or Wilmot, as she will now be termed, and my curse, the bitterest curse which my heart can dictate, shall rest upon thee! Which choose you, boy, the blessing or the curse?"

"The blessing, oh! my father! for this will I sacrifice my every hope of earthly happiness; for this methinks I would resign existence."

"Contemptible fool!" muttered Lawton, "such piteous weakness is equalled only by the baseness of the father!"

"Wretch!" cried the earl, "do you speak thus of me! Begone forever from my sight, and obtrude not thy hated form into my presence again!"

"Earl of Fitzmorton," said the youth, as he fixed his eye upon him, until the angry noble shrank beneath his glance, "thou shalt listen to the words of truth, though spoken by one whom thou deemest so far inferior to thyself! Thou art base, and canst not deny that thou art so! Hast thou not sought to prevent the union of thy son and this sweet girl, even when you knew that their faith was promised, and their happiness involved? To effect this, didst thou not basely remove her from the protection of the king? nay, didst thou not even venture to deal falsely with thy royal master? and wouldst thou not, oh dire atrocity! have wedded her to her own father? Tremble, man of guilt, when thou thinkest on the horrid rite thou soughtest to perform! and now, dost thou not threaten with thy curse their mutual happiness, because thou knowest the yielding weakness of your son cannot brave thee to thy face? Did he possess his sister's dauntless soul, what would thy threats avail thee? and even now, they shall avail thee not! Lord Frederick Villiers, although his tame submission to thy will has made him despicable, shall yet be happy, and the future countess of Fitzmorton shall be the lovely Florence Wilmot! And more than this, that thy pride may be humbled to the dust, thy lovely daughter, whose hopes of happiness thou wouldst also destroy, shall be the bride of the humble Ernest Lawton; and know, that what I have determined shall most surely be performed; and now farewell, good friends!" he said, as he