

consequence of wedding a young gentleman, whose only possessions were a graceful address, and high lineage; concluding, by assuring me, the annuity should be continued as long as I remained deserving of it, and peremptorily forbidding my seeking further intercourse with him, either in person, or by letter."

"Well! we will talk of him no more, mamma; I am sure 'tis anything but a pleasant topic. I will sing some lively ballad, to chase away any sad thoughts which the remembrance of this open-hearted uncle of ours may have excited."

And she advanced towards the piano forte, but notwithstanding the seeming cheerfulness of her tones, there was a slight quivering of the lip, and an almost imperceptible shade of sadness, in the full, soft eye, which the observant mother at once detected.

"Come here, Alice," she said, pointing to the stool, her daughter had quitted.

The latter silently obeyed.

"You cannot deceive me, my child. You feel this deprivation more acutely than you are willing to avow; but Alice, Alice—this is childish;" she continued, as her daughter, whose assumed fortitude suddenly deserted her, burst into tears. "You are sixteen years of age, and to weep thus, like a child, for so trivial a disappointment."

There was a kind smile, however, hovering round the mother's lips, which contradicted the seeming reproof her words conveyed.

"But 'tis my first ball," sobbed the young girl; "and you know how long and earnestly I have desired to go to one. You remember, in the winter evenings, how I have listened to you for hours, describing those at which you assisted in your youth, and the first years of your marriage; scarcely daring to indulge a hope, that I might ever have the happiness of witnessing such a scene of brilliancy; and now, when I have the opportunity, 'tis too hard to be disappointed."

"You shall not be disappointed, my child, for you shall go; but dry up those tears. Really I would scold, only 'tis so very seldom you indulge in them. Ah! sunshine is restored," she added, as, with a radiant smile, Alice looked up into her mother's face. "Now tell me, dearest, what are the pleasures you expect at this ball? Let me see if their loss is worth weeping for."

The young girl's cheek flushed.

"Why, dear mother, novelty, gaiety, and—"

"Admiration," subjoined her mother, quietly.

"And admiration too," was the low-toned reply.

A pause succeeded, when Alice, suddenly rais-

ing her dark, lustrous eyes to her mother's face, exclaimed:

"And why not admiration, mamma? I have been always told I am a graceful dancer, and am I not handsome?"

"Yes, you *are* handsome," replied Mrs. Sydenham, gravely, and for a moment her glance rested with earnestness on the brilliant complexion and raven tresses of her beautiful daughter. "You are handsome and graceful; yet, Alice, possessing both these qualifications, as I have often told you, you may find yourself greatly neglected, and feel very miserable at a ball."

"Let me make the experiment, mamma, dear," was the girlish rejoinder.

"You shall, dear Alice," smilingly returned Mrs. Sydenham, who, as she looked on the sparkling eyes, and sweet smile, dimpling the rose-bud mouth of her companion, felt how improbable it was, that her forebodings would be realized. "And may it prove satisfactory—but away and prepare your gay attire. You have not much time."

With the sparkling delight of a child, the young girl bounded from the room, to enter on her task; and a difficult task it was indeed, for poor Alice's wardrobe contained, not one single one of the many articles indispensable to that of any ball-going young lady. However, Mrs. Sydenham ventured on the unusual extravagance of purchasing a white tarlatane dress, whilst Alice expended the little hoard, she had been for months accumulating for the purchase of new books and music, in the absolute requisites of kid gloves, shoes, flowers, &c. The important night at length arrived, and long before any of the fashionables invited, had thought of entering on the duties of the toilet, Alice, her preparations nearly completed, sat in her mother's room, awaiting her new dress, which had not yet arrived—half reclining in an easy chair, her dreamy gaze fixed on the carpet, as if absorbed in contemplating its dull, faded pattern; for one long hour she sat, without proffering a word. Suddenly Mrs. Sydenham, who had been regarding her some time in silence, exclaimed:

"Why, Alice, you are unusually, wonderfully pre-occupied. What are you thinking of?"

A flood of vivid carnation instantly dyed her cheek and brow, as, after a second's hesitation, she murmured:

"Of to-night and its pleasures, dear mamma."

Ah! Alice! Alice! That answer, though partly true, was not what it should have been. The ball indeed, occupied those thoughts, but only as connected with a still more engrossing subject.