

look around me, and see what the chances are." And the two young men moved leisurely away.

Lord Frederick, from his earliest childhood, had ever been keenly sensible to ridicule, and the brief conversation he had unintentionally listened to, awakened the thought that his present conduct might justly excite it. The thought occurred to his mind, that society had claims upon him, which it was his duty to discharge, and he determined hereafter to pursue a different course. He accordingly emerged from his lurking place, and crossing the room joined the gay group, so recently augmented by lady Harriet and Ernest Lawton.

"Good evening, my lord Frederick!" cried a well known voice, and in the next moment his hand was firmly clasped in that of lord Percival, whom he had not seen since they parted in Kent the preceding summer, his lordship having but two days previously arrived in London. Mutual greetings were exchanged, when his lordship turning to a fair young girl who leaned upon his arm, presented her as his sister, to lord Frederick Villiers.

"Come, my lord, you must, you will join this dance," said Lawton to lord Frederick, as a new set was forming; the young nobleman understood the appealing look of his friend, and presenting his hand to lady Maria Percival, he led her forward to join, for the first time since his residence in London, the giddy dance. The gay throng paused as he took his place among them; lady Lawton and lady Harriet exchanged a glance which told more eloquently than words, the feelings of their hearts, while an expression of pleasure burst from the lips of the earl.

That evening lord Frederick lingered near his new acquaintance, attracted by a softness of manner and a sweet winning smile, which reminded him of his long lost Florence; and lady Harriet, sensitive respecting his constancy to her friend, though she had rejoiced when she saw him so far from his despondency as to join the dance, began to fear that the lovely sister of her old enemy, lord Percival, would exert over him a too powerful chain. His lordship, though accustomed to retire early from such scenes, was on this evening one of the last to linger in the magnificent rooms; his spirits were exhilarated, and he vainly fancied that he was happy. But the solitude of his lonely chamber dispelled the illusion; here the image of the beautiful Florence arose before him, as if to chide his devotion to another.

"Florence, dear idol of my heart!" he cried, as he slowly moved backward and forward through the chamber. "How have I wronged thee, by permitting my truant fancy to wander from thee! Yes, while I, traitor-like, was listening to the

voice of another, you perhaps, in drear and cheerless solitude, were thinking only of me, and fondly anticipating the time when we shall be forever united in the holiest of ties. Oh! my Florence, shall I shrink from bearing for thy dear sake, the ridicule of the heartless? Shall I, to escape their sneers, assume a gaiety from which my soul revolts, and which I feel is unjust to thee? Shall I seek to hide my love from those whose hearts cannot feel the pure flame which burns in mine? No! before the whole assembled world would I avow, that thou art the bright star, whose rays shall illumine my pathway through the world, and point me to a fairer realm, where sorrow shall never mar our joy."

Lord Frederick threw himself into a chair, and was lost in reverie, nor did he arouse himself until the first grey tints of morn began to brighten the eastern sky, when with a heavy heart, and mind agitated by various emotions, he retired to rest, but sleep was a stranger to his pillow, and the morning fully dawned ere he sunk into a disturbed slumber.

#### CHAPTER XX.

TIME, that unwearied traveller, who stays not in his restless flight, flew by on rapid wing, and the season was approaching, when the gaieties of London must be exchanged for the quiet country residence, or the place of fashionable resort; already was the ice bound sway of winter yielding to the genial touch of spring, and balmy zephyrs had succeeded to the bleak chilling blast.

Lord Frederick still continued to join the fashionable throng; sometimes as formerly he sat absorbed in thought, at others the bright smile and soft sweet voice of lady Maria would bring him to her side.

The earl, though disappointed in his hopes of a union between his son and lady Emily, (a union which he was now convinced could never take place, as the parties were so wholly indifferent to each other,) now turned his thoughts to lady Maria with a better ground of hope. Several months had now passed since lord Frederick had met the lowly orphan, and time, the parents fondly hoped, had partially obliterated her image. Lady Maria had been presented to him, not as a candidate for his affection, but as the sister of a highly valued friend, thus he had sought rather than avoided her, and in her bewitching presence, had seemed yielding to the influence of her charms.

"Could one doubt respecting the constancy of Florence be conveyed to his mind," thought the earl, "the end is gained, my boy is saved from