

uttered as many malicious things in ten minutes, as others could have done in as many hours, turned to her, exclaiming:

"Why, my dear Miss Fitz-Hardinge, what is the matter with you? You, who were ever first among the wittiest, seem to have changed places with the most silent and saint-like amongst us all. What has become of your past spirits and gaiety?"

"Pray, do not annoy Miss Fitz-Hardinge, dear Mrs. Wharton," said lady Melton, languidly. "You know, love was never a brightener of people's intellects, or an improvement of their cheerfulness."

"Yes, Miss Fitz-Hardinge is already sobering down, in anticipation, doubtless, of the time when she will have to do so, whether agreeable or not," simpered lady Emily Melton, the sister-in-law of the last speaker.

"Why, Florence, what is all this?" exclaimed Mrs. Wharton, turning to her. "Surely, not entangled in another love affair?"

"Nonsense," rejoined Florence, endeavouring to laugh it off. "These good ladies, tired of exercising their weapons on others, wish to test their efficacy on me."

"No such thing, my dear friend. I half suspected as much, even before lady Melton hinted at it; but who is the fortunate mortal, to whom you have lost your heart?"

"Oh! there is neither losing nor winning in the case, 'tis simply an exchange. Miss Fitz-Hardinge has received Colonel Delamere's heart as an equivalent for her own."

"Colonel Delamere," repeated Mrs. Wharton. "He who distinguished himself so gallantly in India. I have been told he is still a young man, though an experienced soldier, and rigid disciplinarian."

"As to the latter clause, there is no doubt of its truth," said lady Melton, glancing with a meaning smile at Florence.

Mrs. Wharton comprehended the look at once and it made her as conversant with the character and mutual position of Florence and her lover, as if she had been listening to details of their history for weeks.

"Yes," she exclaimed: "those gentlemen, who have been accustomed for years to rule among their black slaves, are sometimes apt to forget when they return to England, that there are no white ones."

"Oh! but Mrs. Wharton, we may be very submissive, very obedient sometimes, even though we are called free, and live in a land of liberty."

"Well! when we are so, we are certainly warring against our own interests," she rejoined.

"I am certain there is not one in the present company who does not coincide with me."

A general smile of assent followed this speech, and lady Emily exclaimed:

"If there is an exception, 'tis Miss Fitz-Hardinge; but we must pardon her. She is peculiarly placed. Colonel Delamere, as you have just said, is so strict a disciplinarian."

"The very reason," said Mrs. Wharton, warmly, "that she should display a double share of energy and independence."

"But, you do not know Colonel Delamere," said lady Melton, with a significant shake of her graceful head, that excessively annoyed Florence.

"We can do much with some men, but nothing with Colonel Delamere."

"Yes, I must say he is rather cold-hearted, as your ladyship has perhaps learned from experience," retorted Florence, putting an interpretation on Lady Melton's speech totally different to its original signification.

"Oh! you mistake her ladyship's meaning entirely, my dear Miss Fitz-Hardinge," interrupted a friend of the last speaker. "She alluded not to his sensibility to beauty, but his invincible determination of character. In three months he could tame the wildest, the most unmanageable amongst us. Witness yourself, for example. Some months ago, who so reckless, so high-spirited as you—to-day, who so grave or good?"

"Nay, Florence," said Mrs. Wharton, pressing her hand affectionately, "I will not listen to any such calumnies against you, for calumnies I feel convinced they are. I know you of old, and no trace of cringing submission, or stupid gentleness ever formed part of your character."

Thankful for this friendly address, so different to her usual stinging remarks, Florence gaily replied:

"I will not attempt to vindicate Colonel Delamere, slandered as he is, but, when you see him you will judge for yourself whether he is the absolute lord, and I the passive slave, we have been kindly represented."

"That is right, Florence, I do not doubt you, but, who is that tall creature like a may-pole, dancing with Miss Clifden. Is he like your future?"

"Not at all. That is Viscount Lawton. Colonel Delamere's manner is very different to the ridiculous flighty one that he assumes."

"Is it not too bad the gallant Colonel is not here to-night? I would almost give my new cashmere to see him, for, you know of old, how restless my curiosity is, when once excited. Do, like a dear girl, give me an idea of what the man is like. Walk, talk, or dance like him?"