

"Tush!"—said George. "Thereby hangs a tale."

I looked up enquiringly, Harrison smiled to himself, and laid his finger significantly upon his lips, as Theophilus Moncton entered the office equipped for a journey.

CHAPTER III.

I am not an adept at sketching portraits, but the person of my cousin is so fresh in my memory that I cannot fail in presenting to my reader a faint likeness of the original. He was below the middle stature, his figure slender and exceedingly well made. His carriage would have been easy and gentlemanlike, but there was such a strong dash of affectation in all he did and said, that it even derogated from his gentility. His head was small, his face thin, his features sharp and prominent. His complexion ought to have been fair, for his hair was very light, and his large grey eyes of a heavy leaden colour, but his skin was thick and sallow, and so nearly approximated to the hue of the few thin straggling hairs that clothed either side of his cheeks, and to which he gave the manly term of whiskers, as hardly to be distinguished from these indispensable appendages. His teeth were of a dazzling whiteness, but so long that they gave to his thin pale lips, and long mouth, a peculiarly savage and malicious expression, which was increased by the ghastly and unnatural convulsion, which was constantly put in requisition to shew off what he considered one of his greatest personal advantages. But Theophilus Moncton had no personal advantages. There was nothing manly or decided about him. His first appearance was most unprepossessing, and few who had been once in his company were anxious to extend their acquaintance.

He was proud and self-opiniated, envious and revengeful. A servile flatterer to his superiors, and insolent and tyrannical to those he considered beneath him. The most sprightly sallies of wit could never produce the least brightening effect upon his saturnine countenance, which only became animated when contradicting some well received opinion, or discussing the merits of an acquaintance, and placing their faults and follies in the most conspicuous point of view. He was endowed with a good natural capacity—possessed an excellent memory and a thorough knowledge of all the darkest and most intricate windings of the human heart. Nothing escaped his observation. It would have been a difficult matter to have made a tool of him, for he never acted without a motive, and had a shrewd knack of rendering the imperfections of others subservient to his own purpose. He was devoted to sensual pursuits and pleasures, but the mask he wore so effectually, concealed his vicious inclinations, that the most cautious parents would have admitted him in-

to their family circle. His dress was an affectation of neatness, and from the neckcloth to the shoe-tie he was arranged with as much precision as a milliner's dress-doll, the first time it is lifted out of the bandbox. Such was Theophilus Moncton, the little effeminate, solemn fop, that presented himself to us.

I gave him the common salutations of the morning without rising from my seat. Harrison's curiosity was excited by his unexpected visit, and perceiving an unusual degree of self-importance written in every line of his face, he said :

"You have chosen a wet morning for your ride, Mr. Theophilus?"

"The choice was none of mine," he replied. "Confound the weather! it has disarranged all my plans. I ordered my horse and servant to be ready at eleven, and dressed for an equestrian expedition. The rain came on at half-past. There is no end to it—I think it means to keep on at this rate all day, and as the wind has changed into the wet quarter perhaps for many days." He cast a peevish look at the dusty ground glass windows. "There is no catching a glance of heaven nor earth through these dim panes. My father's clerks are not called upon to resist such temptations. 'Tis an ingenious plan, and I wish it were adopted in every office and counting-house in London."

Harrison looked down, and by the spattering of his pen, I was convinced that he was suffering an universal spasm from suppressed laughter. But I felt irritated by Theophilus' joking upon a circumstance which I considered a great privation.

"When you had a seat in this office, Mr. Theophilus," I said, purposely laying a strong emphasis on the personal pronoun, "you took good care to keep a peep-hole for yourself well glazed."

"If I were in the office now," he replied, with one of his satirical side-long glances, "I should have too much to do in keeping the clerks in their proper places to spend any time in looking out of the window."

Harrison's tremulous fit increased. The colour mounted to my cheek; my friend gave me a warning glance, but I was too angry to profit by it at the moment.

"Do you think it is just to deny to others the privilege you so liberally allowed to yourself?"

"It is not for a servant in my father's house to question the motives which actuate the conduct of his son."

I rose indignantly from my seat. "Geoffrey,"—pronounced in a solemn and tender tone of remonstrance by Harrison, stayed my uplifted arm. I resumed my seat, muttering between my teeth: "Contentible"—fool—I would have added, but for once prudence got the upper hand of passion, and I was silent. Theophilus seemed anxious to let the matter drop; not that he wanted personal courage—like the wasp, he knew how to attack others, when not