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ALICE SYDENHAM'S FIRST BALL.

BY R. E. M.

"Fill the bright goblet, spread the festive board,
Summon the gay, the noble and the fair;
Through the loud hall, in joyous concert pour'd,
Let mirth and music sound the dirge of care—
But ask not thou if happiness be there."

SCOTT.

"MAMMA, dear Mamma, may I not go to Mrs. Belmont's party, to-morrow night?" exclaimed Alice Sydenham, awakening from the reverie, in which she had been absorbed for the previous half hour.

The lady, at whose feet she sat, laid down the book which had engrossed her attention, and replied with gentle earnestness:

"My dear child, wherefore should you wish to go? The Belmonts are people entirely out of our present sphere, and though Mrs. Belmont herself, remembering your early school girl friendship, may have extended you this invitation, her memory refreshed, as it has lately been, by meeting you some few weeks since, on your return from the country; believe me, she has no serious intention of keeping up your revived acquaintance. She knows our circumstances perfectly well; knows, that whatever our condition may at one time have been, at present we have barely the means of subsistence, and she doubtless supposes you will regard the card you have received, in the same light as that in which it was sent, an unmeaning compliment. Where would a poor, portionless girl, like you, find means for procuring the splendid dress, necessary to your appearing in her fashionable and gorgeous drawing rooms?"

A long pause followed, broken at length by her young companion, who exclaimed, whilst a very perceptible cloud passed over her countenance:

"And to think, mamma,—to think, that you have a rich uncle, who is surrounded by all the luxuries of life; an uncle who possesses no other living relative, save yourself."

"True, Alice, but by his own patient, unremitting industry alone, has he amassed his wealth, and it is but just, he should dispose of it as best pleases him. I never was a favorite with him. How could I be? Brought up from earliest childhood, at a boarding school, miles from home, I never saw him but three times in my life."

"Did you ever see him after your marriage?"

"Never; your father brought me immediately to my new home, in a distant part of England, and thus effectually precluded all further intercourse. However, about a month after your poor father's death, I received a letter from him, enclosing the sum of twenty pounds, which he has regularly transmitted to us, every new year, till the last. He must be either ill, or abroad; but doubtless we will speedily receive the usual sum, for surely he cannot be so cruel as to deprive us so suddenly, without any plausible pretext, of what has for years, proved our chief, I may say, our only support."

"And has he never written to you but once, mamma?"

"Never—the letter enclosing his earliest remittance, was his first and last. It was a cold, formal missive, indeed, informing me, in measured terms, that he had heard of Mr. Sydenham's decease, and of my destitution, a natural