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"DO YOU INTEND TO MARRY HER?" DEMANDS THE MOTHER FIXELY. HIS EYES DROOP; SILENCE IS HIS ONLY ANSWER.

"NO INTENTIONS."

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

Author of "Love's Conflict," "Veronique," etc.

CHAPTER II.

This abrupt and mysterious termination to a love-dream which he had once believed to be the keystone of his life has a great effect upon the bodily and mental health of Eric Keir. He becomes morose, absorbed, and melancholy; relinquishes the pursuits of which he had been most fond, and avoids the society of his friends. His altered behaviour excites much college talk, and all his former companions, save one, are full of conjecture as to the cause of it. That one is Saville Moxon, who alone believes he knows the reason of the change. He thinks that Eric Keir (notwithstanding his protestations to the contrary) has really been smitten, or at least on the high road to being smitten, by

the charms of one or other of the pretty daughters of the Vicar of Fretterley; has given up the pursuit at the exhortation of his friend, and is suffering, by a very natural reaction, for his voluntary sacrifice. Saville Moxon knows as much about it as any of the others.

After a month of silence and suspense, during which, strange to say, Eric Keir, in all his misery, finds a sense of relief at not being obliged to pay those secret visits to Fretterley, old Margaret is dismissed, the cottage given up, and its contents scattered by the hammer, but the memory of the days he has spent there does not pass so easily from the young man's mind. Rather it takes root and poisons his existence, like an unextracted barb, so that he looks five years older in as many months, and loses all the effervescence and hilarity of youth.

His brother and his friends persuade him, after all, to join their walking tour in Brittany, and when it is accomplished, Lord Muiraven and the Moxons return to England by themselves, having left Eric on the Continent.

"The boy has grown too fast and studied too hard," says Lord Norham, in answer to the inquiries of anxious relatives; "and a little relaxation will do him all the good in the world. I expect great things of Eric—great things—but I cannot permit his health to be sacrificed to my ambition." In consequence of which, the Honourable Eric Hamilton Keir is lost to his mother country for two eventful years. Could he but have guessed how eventful!

At the expiration of that period we meet him again at a private ball in London.

It is the height of the season; the weather is warm, the room crowded, and every one not occupied in dancing attempts to find a refuge on the landing, or the stairs.

At the sides of the open door lean two young men, gazing into the ball-room, and passing their remarks on those they see there.

"Who is the girl that Keir's dancing with?"

"Keir! Where is he?"

"Coming down the left-hand side; the girl in black and gold."

"Why, Miss St. John, of course!"

"And why of course? Who may Miss St. John be?"

"My dear Orme, if you're so lamentably ignorant, pray speak a little lower. Not to know Miss St. John argues yourself unknown."

"Indeed! Well, she's uncommonly handsome. I should have no objection to number her amongst my acquaintances."

"I should think not; she is the belle of the season, and only daughter of old St. John the banker, deceased."

"Got any money?"

"Lots, I believe—any way, her face is a fortune in itself. It ought to command a coronet, as faces go nowadays."

"And Keir, I suppose, is first in the field? Well! I am of a self-sacrificing disposition, and wish him good luck."

"He would not thank you for it: he is sublimely indifferent to everything of the sort."

"It does not look like it: I have seen them dancing together several times this evening."

"Ah! that they always do; and I believe he is a constant visitor at the house. But if the St. John cherishes any fond hopes in consequence, I should advise her to relinquish them. Keir is not a marrying man."

"It's early in the day you arrive at that conclusion."

"My dear fellow! he makes no secret of his flirtation, for the matter of that. If he has one affair on hand, he has a dozen, and should Miss St. John discard him to-morrow morning, he would replace her in the afternoon."

"You are not giving your friend a very enviable character," remarks Mr. Orme, who is a young man of a moral and sententious turn of mind, and takes everything *ou grand sérieux*.

