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## FLORENCE; OR, WIT AND WISDOM.\*

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### CHAPTER XIV.

FLORENCE'S re-appearance in the saloons of pleasure, after her short eclipse, was warmly welcomed, and her beautiful dress and brilliant beauty, combined with the absence of Colonel Delamere, who was, in general, somewhat dreaded by the ball-room frequenters, rendered her quite the fashion. Solicitations for introductions, for her hand, poured in upon her with a bewildering rapidity, which reminded her strangely of her first balls, and the unusual and almost girlish elasticity of her spirits, the result, probably, of the double eagerness with which she entered again on pleasures, which had been of late totally denied her, strengthened the delusion. Six, seven dances she had gone through without one moment's intermission, and her last partner, who had just conducted her to a seat, was pressing her to grant him her hand for the next, when lady Howard passed them.

"My dear Florence," she exclaimed, as she noted the startling brilliancy of her cheek, "I must be true to my trust, and I positively forbid you leaving your seat for the next halfhour. You will dance yourself into a fever, or a cold, and then, I will get blamed by Miss Murray,—and well scolded by Colonel Delamere," she added in a whisper. "And you, Miss Wrothesly," and she turned to a young and pretty girl who was fanning herself, and conversing languidly with a companion about her own age, "You and lady Emily, seem also to require rest. Come, we will leave this hot room, and have a comfortable chat in the dear little sitting-room next us."

The proposition was willingly accepted, and two or three others joined the party, but lady Howard was scarcely seated, when she was called away to the music room. Her presence was little missed by her young friends, who comfortably reclining on couches or ottomans in front of the door, commanding a full view of the dancers, were soon engaged in the equally delightful occupation of criticising and looking on. Their remarks, however, were still innocent enough, and more mirthful than bitter; but the party soon received an addition in the person of Mrs. Edward Wharton, who, with lady Melton and several others, entered, and commenting on the comfortable coolness of the room, seated themselves. The meeting between Mrs. Wharton and Florence was very cordial, and the new comer, with some pretty speech about old friendship, threw herself down on the couch beside her.

"Well! I declare we are a very cosy little party," she exclaimed, looking round. "All choice spirits, and I a matron to preside. Come, everything is as it should be, and we must enjoy ourselves. Shall we talk sentiment, or laugh? The latter, perhaps, is the wiser part, and as we dare not laugh at each other, we shall expend our mirth on the dancers."

Thus, led by so reckless and commanding a spirit, the tone of the party soon changed from harmless jesting, to merciless satire. Notwithstanding the absence of Colonel Delamere and the greatness of the temptation, Florence did not shine as she might have done, and her comments were universally censured as tame, her satire as too merciful. Suddenly, Mrs. Wharton, who had

\* Continued from page 494.—Conclusion.