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THE FIRST DEBT.

A TALE OF EVERY DAY.

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Continued from our last Number.

CHAPTER VI.

WE will leave Alice to her own reflections, and follow Arthur and Sophy, in their walk to the ruins. Fleming was much gratified by the kind reception he had met with from his aunt and her charming daughters; and the affection he had long cherished for these relatives, whilst unknown, was greatly strengthened by a personal introduction. He was much interested in the two girls, but suffered the beauty and vivacity of Sophia to blind him to her many faults. Her candour charmed him; and he admired her frank, unaffected manners. Deceived by these, he deemed her a simple, unsophisticated child of nature, who spoke what her heart dictated, and that her expressive countenance betrayed its emotions when her lips were silent. Alice pleased him less than Sophia. But then Alice made no display of her talents. She never alluded to herself in conversation, but left the person whom she addressed to discover her good qualities, and if he was not much gifted with penetration, she would only pass for a silent, every-day companion.

"But is Alice less conscious of her superior talents than Sophy is of her beauty?" thought Arthur. "The same vanity may exist, but she has tact enough to conceal it. If this were not the case, why should sisters so formed by nature to love each other, so charming in their persons, conversation and manners, so refined in their pursuits and habits, disagree?" It was plain that there existed no confidence, nor affinity of mind between them—that they regarded each other in the odious light of rivals, and Sophy took no pains to conceal how irksome she felt her sister's control. "I must solve this mystery," said Arthur, "and examine the characters of these two girls separately, before I can hope to effect a change in their sentiments, or discover in which the error most lies."

While these thoughts were passing rapidly through the mind of Fleming, Sophy felt surprised and annoyed at his long silence. She was convinced that her

cousin was the only young man in the world who would have been so long alone in her company without paying her a single compliment. She pointed out to him the most picturesque objects in the neighbourhood, in order to attract his attention; but he answered her observations at random, until tired of wasting her eloquence on such an inattentive auditor, she ceased speaking altogether. Arthur started from his fit of abstraction, when he no longer heard the sound of her voice.

"Proceed, dear cousin—I am all attention."

"Now, Mr. Fleming, that is too bad," said Sophy, laughing. "If that were the case you would not so often have said no, in the wrong place. Are your thoughts in Holland that you are so grave tonight?"

"I was thinking of you."

"Is this new assertion as apocryphal as the last?"

"Not quite."

"I am rather curious to learn in what manner I could possibly engage your thoughts. Prithoe, good cousin, resolve my impertinent doubts?"

"I fear my frankness may offend you Sophy," said Arthur, looking anxiously in his gay companion's face.

"I am certain that you would never say anything which could give me offence."

"I am not so sure of that." After a short pause he continued: "Sophia, I have remarked with pain, during my short stay at B——, the want of confidence and affection which appears to exist between you and Alice. It is this subject which engrossed my thoughts, and on which I vain would speak."

Sophia colored, and looked down. She was unprepared for this, having suffered her vanity to suggest a very different interpretation to her cousin's thoughts, and her eyes actually filled with tears. Her emotion was not unobserved by Fleming. "I fear I distress you, Sophia?"