

PRESENTIMENT.*

BY M. A. S.

THE day was already far advanced when Eleanor awoke next morning, and having made a hasty toilet she descended to the breakfast-room. Notwithstanding what had passed on the previous evening, she had some strong misgivings as to the reception she should meet from Mary; but she had scarcely entered the room when the latter who had been seated alone at one of the windows, accosted her in cordial accents:

"Oh! good morning, Eleanor!—I am pleased to find you looking so much better to-day. I would not permit any one to awake you earlier, as had been proposed, knowing that a good sound sleep is more refreshing than aught else. Arthur is gone to join a hunting party, so I gave him an early breakfast, and now you and I shall have our meal tête-à-tête."

"Dear Miss Newburk! how very kind you are—oh! could you read my heart at this moment."

"Oh! I know what I should find there, *ma chère*," rejoined Mary, laughingly, "I should doubtless find gratitude in large characters, together with a strong expression of surprise, and an intense desire to know what has caused the change so visible in me. Say, have I not guessed aright?"

"There is no denying the fact," replied Eleanor, gradually catching the other's easy manner—"you have just divined what I would not have ventured to express. Candor compels me to say that you do not appear to me the same Miss Newburk who left the room so abruptly yesterday evening. Since you have chosen to notice the matter, may I hope to have my curiosity gratified?—You will not deem the feeling a reprehensible one, since it is inherent in our feminine nature from the very first years of the world."

"True, Eleanor! and to prove to you that I can forgive your curiosity in this case, I shall, as far as possible, explain away all that now seems mysterious to you. But first let us despatch our breakfast." A smile appeared on Eleanor's countenance as she glanced at the time-piece, and Mary laughed as she exclaimed—"you see I am not quite so strict in exacting punctuality as I have been. It is now half-past ten—so, *allons*." It was a scene of quiet comfort, that breakfast-room—the table in the midst, with its snowy

cover and plain, yet elegant, breakfast-service—the bright fire beaming cheerfully in the brass grate—the radiant sunshine streaming in through the clustering woodbine and eglantine by which the two large windows were shaded—all was peace without and within. The two occupants of the room were each revelling in recovered liberty, for each had just shaken off the iron bondage of cold distrust, and each was drawn towards the other, and ready to make all and every revelation that might interest the hearer. For many a long day and year did one of the parties recall with sorrowing heart that calm morning scene, and mourn that it could never again be renewed—when the light of renovated hope, that had then shone so brightly, was buried with those she loved, and her heart was cheerless as the night of the tomb.

Breakfast over, the ladies adjourned to the sitting-room, and each having taken up her work, Mary spoke—"I am now about to commence, Eleanor, a recital to which I look forward with dread. To me it can only be productive of pain, as it will renew the memory of feelings, which it has been the business of years to destroy. It will remind me of friendships long since broken up, and of cold, heartless deceit, from those whom I had deemed all but perfect. And yet I do not shrink from the attempt, for the time has arrived when justice requires that I should make you acquainted with the causes which have produced effects which to you appear inexplicable. My own character, in fine, demands that I should explain the motives by which I have been actuated. Now, when the cloud has passed away, which so long obscured my mental vision, and that I can view my late conduct by the clear light of reason, it appears altogether unjustifiable, so that I much fear even the best explanation I can give will fail to exculpate me in your eyes—yet for Arthur's sake—for your sake—nay, even for my own I must decide on encountering this trial—I must open the long closed gates of memory, and return to the days of my youth, that I may bring hence the information which you desire." She paused for a few moments, and sat with eyes fixed in deep thought,