

"But tell me, what has caused you to perpetrate the unheard-of barbarism of calling at this hour in the morning?"

"Simply a friendly solicitude to know if you have obtained a card for this grand ball at Mrs. Westcott's, to-morrow night?"

"Oh! yes," rejoined Florence, laughingly; "I will be one the more to admire her new set of curtains, which have come direct from Paris. Really, that woman has a Parisian mania. The other day, she gravely informed me that her tapes and ribbands all came from Paris, adding, in the same breath, that she never patronized any article of English manufacture."

"Patriotic soul!" exclaimed Clinton, sarcastically.

"I fancy she will be telling us next," resumed Florence, "that she is imported herself from France, new for use, for, you know, she is a capital butt for her friends. We have all our use in this terrestrial globe, and I must say Mrs. Westcott fulfils her post with scrupulous fidelity."

"Oh! really, we must leave off stabbing poor Mrs. Westcott in the dark, especially as we are to dance at her expense to-morrow night," rejoined young Clinton, as he rose, highly amused.

"Yes, and we will have a view of the Paris curtains; but what is this?" and she took up the volume he had just laid down. "'The necessity of gentleness for the failing of others.' Upon my word, Mr. Clinton," she added, with a heightened colour, "you are almost as zealous a follower in the evangelical way, as my aunt herself. If you do not read me a sermon, you give me one to read. When am I to prepare your scrip and staff?"

"When you are converted," he returned, with a merry smile; "and I fear I will have plenty of time, ere then, to get them in order."

"Well! even this does not surprise me, from you;" and despite her efforts, a smile stole over her face. "In fact, there is nothing in the line of impertinence or gratuitous meddling, which Mr. Percival Clinton could be guilty of, which would."

"You are complimentary; but read it, and I'll pardon; practise it, and I'll forget;" and with a graceful bow he left the room.

After his departure, Florence glanced at the book, and then flung it to the end of the table, murmuring:

"'Tis allowable in him, a companion of childhood," she resumed her seat, but her face wore a shade of annoyance which it had been free from before. "Strange!" she murmured at length; "Percival Clinton is greatly changed! Six

months ago, there was a devotion in his manner which betokened a more than usual regard for me; and now, I question if the greatest stranger could be an object of more profound indifference to him than I am? What can have changed him? Am I less handsome, less fascinating? No! quite the reverse. The silly timidity which characterized me then, is entirely replaced by a sparkling animation. Well, I will think of it no more. Very likely he has found some new divinity who has eclipsed me entirely, and I must do likewise."

Had Florence but obtained one glance at the secret thoughts of Percival Clinton, her doubts would have been speedily dissolved. She would have learned that her own sarcastic spirit, which she had more fully displayed to him, as yet, than to any other individual, was the true, the only cause. In one particular she was right. Six months before, he had indeed cherished for her very different feelings to those which now filled his heart. Admiration still remained, yet, whilst he laughed at her sallies, admired the brilliancy of her wit; he, at times, despised her for that very gift, or rather her abuse of it.

CHAPTER II.

THAT night Florence, radiant in her smiles and beauty, made her appearance in Mrs. Westcott's saloon, and few, who looked on her bright, childish brow, and sweet joyous smile, would have dreamed that the demon of uncharitableness lurked beneath that fair exterior—yet, so it was. Florence, left an orphan at an early age, was consigned to the guardianship of an aunt, who, notwithstanding her devotion and tenderness, was a mere novice in everything pertaining to the management of children. The spirit of mockery, displayed by her young charge at so early a period, and which betrayed itself in quick retorts, a passionate pleasure in "taking people off," as it is called, aping their gestures, voice, manner, was unexpressed by Miss Murray, and encouraged, applauded, by all others. Florence had thus grown up, her failing unchecked, till it had become almost a vice. With a heart really free from malice, she inflicted more pain, wrought more evil, than many whose natures were filled perhaps with unkindness and bitterness. As yet, however, she was universally admired, universally lauded for her wit and beauty, and her sky was without a cloud. The morning after the party, Miss Murray was sewing in her own room, when the door opened, and her niece entered.

"Good morning, Florence! you are unusually