

IDA BERESFORD; OR, THE CHILD OF FASHION.*

BY R. E. M.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHATEVER were the thoughts which had engrossed Ida, after the departure of the Marquis of Pemberton, as recorded in the preceding chapter, it was not difficult to divine that they had proved of any nature but pleasant, for on descending to the drawing room some time after, her check was yet pale, while her countenance bore the unmistakeable traces of agitation. Though her companions could not fail to perceive the latter circumstance, they carefully avoided noticing it. No allusion, however slight, was made to her visitor; but there was a subdued tone of kindness in their manner, which told that they truly sympathized with her. This visit was soon apparently forgotten, but Mrs. Vernon congratulated herself on having at length discovered the exact cause of Ida's secret unhappiness.

"'Tis not yet removed though," she inwardly thought, as she noted that Ida was as depressed, as restless as ever. "Poor child! would that she could repose her confidence in me. I might find some solace for her grief. But that is impossible!"

And it was indeed impossible! Poignant as the sorrows of Ida Beresford might have been, they were confined to her own bosom. Her proud heart alike refused advice or sympathy. A further confirmation of Mrs. Vernon's suspicions was afforded to her some time after. One evening whilst Ida was seated near the window, gazing silently from it, Claude entered and approached her; she started, for the event was merely indeed one of unusual occurrence, but he placed a packet in her hands, saying:

"From the Marquis of Pemberton."

"Is he here?" she asked. "Did he send no message?"

She stopped short, confused and embarrassed, for she met the eye of Claude fixed searchingly upon her.

"Fear not to ask," he at length rejoined, in a low, even gentle tone. "I know what you would say: the Marquis is not here; but he sends his respectful regards with the accompanying volumes, which he hopes with help to enliven the monotony of your country life. He also adds,"

here he stopped a moment as if to observe the effect his words produced, "that he hopes to have the pleasure of paying Miss Beresford a visit in person, ere many weeks elapse."

Claude's meaning pause, his searching glance, all tended to embarrass his listener, and with a check suffused with crimson she murmured her thanks, and hastily rising, passed from the room. Again alone, she angrily dashed the books on the ground, and burying her head in the cushions of her chair, exclaimed with passionate emotion:

"Yes! disguise it as I will, I love this cold, unfeeling being! Oh! how I have striven to deceive myself, to persuade my own heart that I hated him; but further disguise is unavailing. Though I would not even acknowledge it in thought, it was he who prompted my indifference to Stormont, my rejection of Pemberton and all others, and 'tis he, who now renders the idea of a union with the Marquis insupportable. Yes! I, the star of fashion, the courted, the flattered Ida Beresford, have bowed my heart and its affections at the feet of the only one who has ever treated me with scorn; who alone has laughed at my fascinations, triumphed over my beauty. Where, where is my boasted pride? Where the haughty spirit that once laughed at all idea of subjection? Oh! how I am changed! What sufferings, what humiliations would I not undergo to gain one smile from those lips, winning to all others, stern, haughty, to me alone. And this, this, must be for life! Without one friendly ear to listen to my grief, one gentle voice to console me. My earthly career lonely, desolate, unloved. Oh! 'Tis more more than I can bear! And she pressed her hand to her burning brow, as if she would have stilled its agonized throbbings. A passionate flood of tears somewhat relieved her bursting heart, and she wept long with a vehemence that would have startled a beholder unacquainted with the overwhelming energy of her character. She heard not the door unclose, she saw not Lucy approach, and it was not till the latter knelt beside her, and flung her arms round her neck, that she was even conscious of her presence.

"Ida, speak!" she tenderly said. "Tell me the cause of your grief. Oh! trust me 'twill be breathed to no unsympathizing ear." The voice