

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD Frederick was alone, wrapped in a reverie so profound that he heard not the light step of Lawton, as he entered the library. His arm rested on a table, and his hand supported his head, and the youth paused for some moments to contemplate this victim of a parent's pride; his cheek was pale and sunken, and his neglected locks hung wildly around his brow; Ernest approached, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. Lord Frederick started from his seat, and then sunk languidly to it again, as he said—

"You, Ernest, have not quite forgotten me, although my unmanly weakness has made me despise myself! Oh you know not how I have wished to see you again, yet I dared not seek you!"

"I should not have neglected you so long, had I not done so in the hope of being the bearer of good tidings; I have ventured to interfere a little with your affairs, even without consulting you, and the consequence is, that I have spoiled all the chance of your obtaining the hand of lady Maria Percival. Yes, you are now free, so it is poor little Florence, or no lady Villiers! You look incredulous; but listen! When I left you so unceremoniously in Cambridge, I departed for London, and hastened to carry into effect a little plan I had formed; I wrote to lady Maria, informing her of the connection which existed between yourself and Florence; I told her the simple truth, namely, that you are now, and have for some time been desperately in love with her, and explained the deception which was practised upon you, by which the earl succeeded in getting you to consent to his proposal for the hand of her ladyship. The result is as I anticipated; her ladyship freely resigns her claims to your hand, and you are free!"

"But Florence, where is she? I saw the death of Sir James recorded in the public prints, and her fate has been to me a source of deep anxiety."

"Come with me, and I will take the task of finding her upon myself, but hereafter I shall appoint you her especial guardian, and hope you will be enabled to give good testimony of the manner in which you perform your trust. So come with me to London! The inmates of our little cottage will give you a joyous welcome!"

"But, my father! I cannot, even to ensure my happiness, endure his malediction!"

"Nonsense! when he finds his threats are useless, he will be quiet enough, and I will venture to say that Florence will yet be as great a favorite as I expect to be, after filching from him his pet treasure, our bonny Harriet."

Removed from the influence of his father, lord

Frederick yielded to the persuasions of Lawton, and the next morning set out for London. Their reception was as welcome as Lawton had promised, and the few scruples of Florence to give herself to him who had so long possessed her heart, were easily overcome by the united influence of her friends, and the more powerful pleadings of her own heart.

Once more our orphan stood before the altar, but not now was she an unwilling bride; Lord Frederick Villiers stood beside her, and to him she now freely gave the hand which had once nearly passed into the possession of another. That awful scene and the untimely fate of her parent presented themselves to her remembrance, and clouded the joy of the present moment. And now did lord Frederick first learn that she was far from being a portionless bride; but the possessor of wealth equal to his own. After spending a few days with the banker, who, notwithstanding his great age, graced the nuptial scene, they took a tender leave of the Lawtons, and with the promise that Ernest would soon follow them, repaired to their lovely house in Devonshire.

Lord Frederick had written to his parents the day after his marriage, imploring their pardon for his disobedience; but many days elapsed ere he received an answer. At length it came, and his soul sunk within him as he perused its contents. The long dreaded curse was pronounced in the most fearful terms the heart of man could dictate, and forbidding him to regard longer as his parents those whom he had dishonored by his alliance; he was debarred from ever appearing in their presence, or writing to them, and thus was he cast from the parents he so fondly loved. His heart was rent with anguish, and the thought that the beautiful Florence was now his own could not console him. Long he paced the floor of his room in anguish of spirit, and repined at his unhappy fate. But reason at length came to his aid, and he resolved that he would forget his father's anger, and appreciate the blessings which he now enjoyed. He thought of his lovely wife, who lived but in his smile, and remembered that for her sake he suffered. "I will be happy," he said, "the smile of Florence shall compensate for all I have lost for her sake," and hereafter, although he thought of his father's anger with regret, it brought no anguish to his heart.

At length he received intelligence that his parents, accompanied by lady Harriet, were gone abroad. Thus all hopes of a reconciliation were for the present destroyed; and in the enjoyment of domestic bliss, and the society of his few inti-