

Before she went down to luncheon, Maud carefully washed the hand which politeness had compelled her to give him, and which he had pressed with what she was pleased to consider unnecessary warmth.

CHAPTER VIII.

Sir William meanwhile had betaken himself to an hotel in the neighbourhood, where he discussed an excellent luncheon, and decided upon a plan of action. That Miss Brereton was indifferent to his own, and to say the least of it, that she was not averse to Mr. Carlton's attentions, was clear, so he told himself. Yet beyond his personal appearance, in what did the curate excel him, the baronet? In nothing. Wealth, rank, cleverness were on his own side, and with these weapons, he determined to carry the day, and unite Beauty—money was quite a minor consideration to a man like William Dinacre—to the Beast. And he pictured to himself Maud seated at the head of his table. And the picture was a pleasant one. Of her feelings he took no account. Was she not a woman, and therefore bound to obedience? Her father might safely be counted amongst the number of his own partisans, so he thought he had nothing to do, but to ask and to obtain the lady's hand, if not her heart. "All is fair in love and in war, and mine she shall be somehow! So look to yourself, Carlton!" he said, half aloud, and with this sentiment he pushed aside his plate, buttoned up his coat, ordered his horse and rode away. His destination was the house where Mr. Carlton lodged. That gentleman was at home, but was just going out, and as the servant made the observation, Mr. Carlton came out of the door.

"I thought I should be sure to find you at home at this time," said Sir William.

"I am generally at home at this hour, but I have been called to see a sick person, and therefore must beg you will excuse my not asking you to come in," was the reply.

"When shall you be back, for I am resolved to see you to-day, if possible?"

"I can hardly say, for my parishioner lives at some distance, and I shall be compelled to make a few other visits amongst the poor of the district," returned Mr. Carlton coldly.

"A call can be paid just as well out of doors as in a room," returned his visitor, pertinaciously, "so as you say that your spiritual patient lives at some distance, I will accompany you, if you will allow me." So saying, and without waiting for an answer, the baronet jumped off his horse, drew his arm within the bridle, and walked on by the side of the clergyman.