

of his *fiancée*, who was immediately in advance of him, unconscious however of his close proximity.

To his infinite surprise and mortification, he perceived that so far from being taciturn and less cheerful, she seemed in excellent spirits, and perfectly satisfied with her companion, whose satirical spirit was quite to her taste. Still, to see her thus absorbed by the attentions of a young and handsome stranger, awoke no sentiments of jealousy in his breast. He felt too well assured of her affection, and though once the thought crossed him: "If Florence's love equalled your own, would she be so happy in your absence?" it was rejected with disdain. He had subject enough for discontent and unhappiness in her thoughtless spirit, without incurring the additional misery of doubting her affection. Sad, sorrowful indeed, was that drive to the young nobleman, and though the pure morning breeze that lifted the bright locks from his brow was full of balmy sweetness, it dispelled not the cloud of care that lurked in his dark eyes. Thoughts of regret, of bitterness, and of dread, thronged upon him, and manfully as he tried, he could not banish them. In vain he looked on the landscape before him, so rich in nature's loveliness; in vain he watched the bright sunbeams streaming down in chequered light and shade through the light and quivering foliage of the silver birch, the pale leaved sycamore or the closer linked boughs of the stately oaks and chestnuts under which they journeyed—his restless glance ever turned to the young girl before him, she who was so soon to be mistress of that noble demesne, and again and again his heart proposed the fearful question, the question from which he ever shudderingly recoiled: "*St. Albans, hast thou chosen well and wisely?*" Revolving such torturing reflections, he pursued his silent way through the narrow paths and haunted dells of the old wood, by the side of his languid companion, till they emerged on a large and beautiful extent of level country.

Here, one of the party proposed a trial of speed, and as Florence reined in her beautiful steed, the earl's last gift, she turned, and for the first time perceived him.

"What! you here, my lord! I thought you were in advance, the leader of our party."

"No, still I did not intrude on you more than if I were," he returned in a tone which he vainly endeavored to render kind as usual. While he was speaking one of his servants advanced at full gallop, and with a respectful bow, presented him a couple of letters which he had just brought from the neighboring town. St. Albans took them and silently put them in his bosom, when Flo-

rence, who had marked his dissatisfied air, exclaimed, with a sweet smile:

"Come, my lord, I challenge you to a race. I will uphold my pretty Flora against your fiery Regis. We will choose Sir Edward Westover for umpire."

"Forgive me, Miss Fitz-Harding, but I must be uncourteous enough to decline your proposal, as these epistles require an immediate reply. Sir Edward will have the kindness to excuse me to the rest of the party, and he will also supply my place in the coming trial as skilfully as he has done heretofore."

With a smiling and perfectly composed air, he bowed lowly to Florence, apologized to his companion, the lady Jacintha, who had already found a substitute in a gentleman expecting preferment in the state through her father's interest; then setting spurs to his horse, was soon out of sight.

We will not accompany Florence and her party further. Every sketch book and tourist's journal, records similar excursions better told than our pen could render them; suffice it to say they arrived at the ruins, explored them, smiled, talked about the fashions, whilst leaning against the old grass-grown tombs of the dead that slumbered beneath, or laughingly commented on the quaint, rude devices of the time-worn funereal slabs at their feet. Follow we St. Albans on his homeward path. After a time he slackened his speed, and suffering the reins to fall on the neck of his horse, proceeded at a pace which told his letters were not of the urgent importance he had represented. Arrived at home, he dismounted, and flinging the bridle to the servant in waiting with an abruptness which surprised the man, entered, and threw himself on the first sofa he met. But repose was favorable to thought, and thought was at that moment anything but agreeable to the earl. Tormenting regrets for his precipitate departure—self-reproach for yielding to his own weakness—impatient feelings against Florence, rapidly succeeded one another, and unable to bear them longer, he sprang up from the couch and passed into the next apartment, endeavoring by rapid motion to dispel his harrassing doubts. Careless whither he bent his steps, he found himself at length before the picture gallery. The solitude and stillness of the place, the view of the lifeless semblances of those whose cares and joys were long since hushed in the grave, ever acted with a soothing power on his feelings when disturbed or irritated. He pushed the door, which to his surprise was ajar, and entered. He paused, however, on the threshold, and half retreated, for the apartment was not unoccupied.