

THE BALL.

“EVEN if I were not prevented by this unlooked-for engagement from accompanying you to the ball to-night, my love,” said the Honourable Alfred Seymour to his beautiful young wife, “you must nevertheless have declined it, for the child is evidently unwell; look how the pulses throb in this little throat, Sophia!”—“So they always do, I believe. I really wish you were less of a croaker and caudle-maker, my dear; however, to make you easy, I will send for Doctor Davis immediately: as to the ball, as I am expected, and have gone to the trouble and expense of a new dress, and have not been out for such a long, long time, really I think I *ought* to go.”

“You would not leave my boy, Lady Sophia, if”
—“Not if there is the least danger, certainly; nor if the doctor should pronounce it *ill*; but I

do not believe it is so—I see nothing *particular* about the child, for my part.”

As the young mother said this, she cast her eyes on the child, and saw in its little heavy eyes something which she felt assured *was* particular—she saw moreover, more strikingly than ever, the likeness it bore to a justly beloved husband, and in a tone of self-correction added, “ Poor little fellow, I do think you are not quite the thing, and should it prove so, mamma will not leave you for the world.”

The countenance of the father brightened, and he departed assured that the claims of nature would soon fully triumph over any little lingering love of dissipation struggling for accustomed indulgence; and as he bade her good by, he did not wonder that a star so brilliant desired to exhibit its rays in the hemisphere alluded to, which was one in the highest circle of fashion. Nevertheless, as he could not be present himself, he thought it on the whole better that she should be absent. A young nobleman, who had been his rival and wore the

willow some time after their marriage, had lately paid marked attention to a young beauty every way likely to console him; and Mr. Seymour thought it would be a great pity if his lady, whom he had not seen for some months, should by appearing before him in the full blaze of beauty (unaccompanied by that person whose appearance would instantly recall the sense of her engagement) indispose his heart for that happy connexion to which he had shown this predilection.

Unfortunately, the fond husband gave indication of his admiration alike in his looks and words; and as the fair young mother turned from him to her mirror, she felt for a moment displeased that her liege lord should be less solicitous than herself to “witch the world” with her beauty; and whilst in this humour she called her maid to show her the turban and dress “in which she intended to appear.”

“Lauk, my lady! why sure you intends it yet—did ever any body hear of such a thing as going for to stay at home when you are all prepared. Why,

you've been out of sight ever so long because you was not fit to be seen, as one may say; but now that you are more beautifuller than ever, by the same rule you should go ten times as much—do pray, my lady, begin directly—ah! I knows what I know. Miss Somerville may look twice ere she catches my lord, if so be he sees you in this here plume; cold broth is soon warm, they say.”

Could it be that this vulgar nonsense—the senseless tirade of low flattery and thoughtless stimulation to error—could affect the mind of the high-born and highly educated Lady Sophia? Alas! yes—a slight spark will ignite dormant vanity, and the love of momentary triumph surpass the more generous wish of giving happiness to others in a sphere distinct from our own.

The new dress was tried on; its effects extolled by the maid, and admitted by the lady, who remembered to have read or heard of some beauty whose charms were always most striking when she first appeared after a temporary confinement.

The carriage was announced, and she was actually descending when the low wail of the baby broke on her ear, and she recollected that in the confusion of her mind during the time devoted to dress and anticipated triumph, she had forgotten to send for the medical friend of the family.

Angry with herself, in the first moment of repentance she determined to remain at home, but unfortunately reconsidered, and went before the arrival of the doctor;—'tis true she left messages and various orders, and *so far* fulfilled a mother's duties, but she yet closed her eyes to the evident weakness of her boy, and contented herself with determining to return as soon as it was possible.

But who could return while they found themselves the admired of all, and when at least the adoration of eyes saluted her from him whom she well knew it was cruelty or sin to attract. The observation forced upon her of Miss Somerville's melancholy looks told her this, and compelled her to recollect that she was without her husband, and therefore critically situated; and as

“in the midst of life we are in death,” so she proved that in the midst of triumph we may be humbled—in the midst of pleasure be pained; and she resolved to fly from the scene of gaiety more quickly than she had come.

But numerous delays arose, each of which harassed her spirits not less than they retarded her movements, and she became at length so annoyed, as to lose all her bloom and hear herself as much condoled with on her looks as she had a few hours before been congratulated;—she felt ill, and was aware that she merited to be ill, and had a right to expect reproaches from her husband, not less on account of herself than her child; and whilst in this state of perplexity was summoned to her carriage by her servants, who, in the confusion occasioned by messengers from home as well as from herself, had increased her distress.

The young mother arrived in time to see the face of her dying child distorted by convulsions, and to meet from her husband anger, reproach, and contempt. She was astonished, even ter-

rified, by witnessing the death of the innocent being she had forsaken in a moment so critical; and bitter was the sorrow and remorse which arose from offending him who had hitherto loved her so fondly and esteemed her so highly. These emotions combining with other causes, rendered her soon the inhabitant of a sick-bed, and converted a house so lately the abode of happiness and hope, into a scene of sorrow, anxiety, and death. Lady Sophia, after much suffering, recovered her health; but when she left her chamber she became sensible that although pity and kindness were shown to her situation, esteem and confidence were withdrawn. She had no child to divert the melancholy of her solitary hours, and, what was of more consequence, no husband who could condole with her on its loss—silence of the past was the utmost act of tenderness to which Mr. Seymour could bring himself on this subject, which recurred to him with renewed pain when his anxiety was removed for the life of one still dear, though no longer invaluable.

And all this misery, the fearful prospect of a

long life embittered by self-reproach, useless regret, and lost affection, was purchased by a new dress and an ignorant waiting-maid—a risk so full of danger and so fatal in effect was incurred, to strike a man already refused, and wound a woman who never injured her. Such are the despicable efforts of vanity for temporary distinction, and such the deplorable consequences of quitting the tender offices of affection and transgressing the requisitions of duty.

B. H.

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