

Literature, &c

THE TWO WIDOWS.

Concluded.

For a week after this, all went on smoothly; my poor friend was completely in a fool's paradise; he rode on horseback, wore fashionable boots, sent to town for a coat of the most stylish cut, and talked very seriously of sporting a Brutus wig and I was afraid it was all over with him. The widow was demure, cautious, and sentimental, seldom spoke louder than a whisper, and assented to all that was said, appearing to have neither will nor opinion of her own, and I perceived that Sir William was impatient for the expiration of the time which his promise to me bound him to wait before he made his proposals in form. A few days only before this period would have arrived, I happened to be at one of the inns when the London coach arrived, and, among the passengers, I perceived Freeman, who has been for many years my stockbroker, and is a very honest as well as a very wealthy man though not exactly a gentleman either in appearance or manner, being very short, very fat, and very florid, and having a purple nose, which speaks of the devotion of its master not to the purple light of love, but to the purple juice of the grape, to the free use of which, added to the usual city indulgences in turtle and venison, he is indebted for sundry humors which show themselves in the form of pimples, to remove some of which was probably the occasion of his visit to Harrowgate. 'Ah, Mr. Medley,' said he—'glad to meet you here—left the Bear garden, you see, for a little Yorkshire physic—won't stay longer than I can help though—making money like dirt in London, but no use without health; doctor told me a fortnight at Harrowgate would set me up again; offered him five hundred pounds to cure me without leaving town—should make double the money by staying, but he says it won't do, so left home, and lots of invitations to venison dinners, and claret and hock, and am sent down here with orders to eat mutton, and drink Harrowgate water. Ha! ha! ha!'

The next morning I met him at the well, and joined him in the walk, having just parted from Sir William and the widow, who were proceeding homewards. 'Ah,' said he, 'I see you know Mrs. Morton—a widow still, hey! fine woman though, but old birds, you know, (winking his eye,) are not caught with chaff.'—'The lady,' said I, 'is still a widow, but not likely long I fancy to remain so: the gentleman who is walking with her pays her particular attention, and I believe is likely to succeed.'—'What!' said Freeman, 'forgot the dear departed, hey!'—'Not altogether,' said I, 'for though I understood that many others have failed, yet this gentleman will owe his success, and his admission into her good graces, entirely to his astonishing resemblance to her late husband, which affected her most alarmingly the first day she saw him in this place.' Here the little stockbroker burst out into so violent a shock of laughter, that every eye was turned on him, and, having in his convulsion dropped his glass of water on the ground, in order to prevent himself from following it, he caught hold of the shawl of a young lady, who stood near him, and who, with looks of extreme terror, left it in his hand, and made her escape, probably thinking that he was seized with hydrophobia. I had enough to do to apologize and restore order, but it was not till after a second burst of laughter, and sundry chuckles and contortions of mirth, that he could compose himself sufficiently to explain to me the cause of the uproar.

'Do you really,' said he, 'mean to say that the widow has placed her affections on that tall, thin, gentlemanly-looking man, on whose arm she was leaning when she left the walk, and that it is in consequence of his resemblance to her late husband?'—'Exactly so,' said I. 'Why,' resumed he, after another convulsion of laughter, 'I was once very near being taken in by this very Mrs. Morton myself; I met her two years ago at Margate, and she was struck at the sight of me in the same manner: I was the express image of her departed love, I spoke like him, laughed like him, and had exactly his free and joyous temper, and she told me that though he had been something too much of a bon-vivant, he was one of the best natured

fellows on earth, and always the life of the company, just as I was. Well, all this made some impression on me; not that I should have cared a pin for it, if I had heard it in London, where I am always busy from morning till night: but when one leaves business and comes to a watering-place, one is always disposed to fall in love, from having nothing on earth else to do—and then the women all look so pretty, and are so well dressed, and make themselves so agreeable, that I have more than once felt disposed to make a fool of myself, and this time I really had a narrow escape, for I thought such a handsome and loving wife as she would be likely to make, I might not meet with again in a hurry; but, by the greatest chance in the world, I met one of my customers or clients, as our agents call them, who had formerly been in the army, and, as he had come into a good sum of money by the death of a relation, I had transacted a great deal of business for him in our line. He immediately recollected Mrs. Morton, whose husband had been a lieutenant in the same regiment with him, and he told me he was a little, mean-looking, broken-spirited, contemptible fellow, despised by most of the officers, but by no one so much as by his wife, whose insolence to him was noticed by everybody. They lived the life of a cat and dog, and her shameful neglect of him in the illness which terminated his life had exposed her to the severest reprehension. She was the daughter of a country shopkeeper, had not sixpence of fortune, but had every disposition to spend a large one. This account was quite enough for me; I took French leave, set off by the steam-packet, and got to town in time for a six-o'clock dinner, and I ate my roasted duck, and drank my bottle of port wine, with double relish, from the thought that I was still my own man.'—'You will,' said I, 'have no objection to repeat to Sir William what you have just now said to me.'—'Not in the least,' replied he, 'I will readily do a good turn for him, as my friend at Margate did for me, and really this trick of resemblance is too barefaced, and will soon be as common as ring or money-dropping.'

On our return to the hotel, I communicated to Sir William all that I had heard, and introduced to him the little stockbroker, who confirmed it. Sir William's eyes were opened; he thanked us both with great sincerity, and the next morning the barouche and four was at the door at an early hour, and while we were at breakfast, it was announced by some of the company that Sir William Etherington had taken his departure from Harrowgate without any intention of returning to it the present season.

A few days afterwards, I fell in with General Lumley, who is, like myself, a frequent visiter to this place. I was relating the above anecdote to him, and we were making ourselves very merry with this and similar stories, of which we could, each of us, recollect more than one. 'Medley,' said he at length, 'I do not think it quite fair that we should be so universal in our satire: there are good and bad of all sorts; there are many hundreds of artful scheming women, like the one of whom we have been speaking; but there are also many whose virtues and retiring excellencies shed a lustre on their own characters, and would redeem the faults and follies of their sex; but women of this estimable character are comparatively but little known; they do not exhibit themselves to public view, but it is in retirement in the bosoms of their families, that we must seek them. I can introduce you to a widow whose constancy has been unshaken, and whose affection has survived the object of it through the changes of half a century of widowhood.' 'Well,' said I, laughing, 'if that is the case, I may visit her without danger; but when you first spoke I was fearful you were going to expose me to the temptation of some beautiful Ephesian matron.'—'The lady of whom I speak,' said the general, 'has been known to me from my earliest years; she is now nearly eighty years of age, and, when I was a mere boy, she was a beautiful and admired woman. She was an heiress and an orphan, and at about the age of twenty, was situated near that of my father, in this county. I can remember, when at home from the holidays, being taken to visit at Shirley Park, and never have I seen any living creature so beautiful as was then Lady Shirley, and I have heard my father say that he never witnessed a union which seemed to afford such perfect happiness. Her

whole idea of earthly felicity seemed centred in her husband; his wish was a law; his sentiments became hers; she formed her character on the model of his, and the result was as perfect domestic bliss, and as perfect excellence of conduct, as are to be attained by mortals in this world of error. But this was not to last; a fever, brought on by over-fatigue, and cold taken after a day of riding, terminated the life of Sir Robert eight years after his marriage, and he left his wife, at the age of about eight-and-twenty, possessed of perfect beauty, a splendid fortune at her own disposal, and the reputation of having made her husband the happiest man in the county. For one month after his death she was seen by no one; the answer to all inquiries was that she was not dangerously ill, but too unwell to receive the visits even of her most intimate friends. At the end of that period she again appeared, but how changed!—it seemed that the events of a few weeks had done the work of years. Beautiful she still was though in grief, and beautiful she is even now in old age; neither sorrow nor time can destroy the perfect symmetry of her form, and the matchless harmony of her features; but the face was no longer radiant with happiness, the eyes no longer sparkled in the light and sunshine of her felicity; the smile of welcome was no more; no more did she advance with light and joyous step to meet those who loved her and wished her well, but she stood like a monumental figure on the tomb of the dead, as pale, as cold, and almost as lifeless. She spoke not of her feelings herself, but she did not avoid the subject when introduced by another. At the mention of her husband a short convulsive spasm, passing across her face, showed how her heart vibrated at the name; but hers was not the grief to find relief in words and those who came with the wish to console her found that the greatest kindness they could show her was to be silent. There was no parade or affectation of any sort about her, and none was shown in her mourning garb, or in the time of wearing it. She wore the dress of a widow as long, and no longer, than is usual, and when she discontinued it, her appearance was, as it ever had been, marked by simplicity and elegance, without show or splendor. At this period she was surrounded by lovers; few women, I should think, have ever had more, or more advantageous offers, than she received. She might have added riches to her own wealth, and exchanged her own title for some that ranked high in the peerage, but to all her answer was the same—polite, but decisive; every one felt that it was final, and, though disappointed, few were offended. One of her admirers, the Nimrod of the county, a man of rough manners and exuberant spirits, was rallied at a public dinner on his dismissal by the beautiful widow, and advised not to give up the chase so easily, and reminded of his own frequently-given opinion on the stability of woman, but he emphatically declared that such calm determination, with such unaffected sweetness and gentleness of manner, he had never before witnessed; and the man must be worse than a savage who could give her a moment's uneasiness by persevering in a suit that she had declared fruitless, and that if he knew any one who did so, he would willingly horsewhip him with his own hand.

'Her resolution to remain single became generally known, and she was freed from the annoyance of lovers, but she converted them into friends, who would have died to serve her, and admirers and veneration of her consistent and excellent character.'

'She has now passed rather more than fifty years in her state of widowhood, and has never been twenty miles from her own house in all that time: she spends her noble fortune entirely in acts of beneficence, friendship and charity. You will not hear of her at Bible-meetings, but it is not her fault if any cottager, within ten miles of her estate, has not a Bible in his possession: you will not see her name enrolled in the list of subscribers to Missionary-Societies: but she throws all around her, and on all who are within the sphere of her influence, the light of Christianity, while in her own conduct and character she holds forth a brilliant example of all that a christian ought to be.'

'All the power over others that she derives from her wealth, her rank, and her understanding, has been ever uniformly exerted to promote the cause of religion and virtue: she has established extensive schools in