

a circle of young ladies, one or two of whom were making vain attempts to engage her in conversation. They at last, however, relinquished the effort, and remarked in a low tone as they passed Esther, "she is certainly one of the most insipid girls that I ever saw. All she has said in reply to my strenuous exertions to make her talk is, 'yes,' 'no,' 'do you think so?' and the like."

Esther glanced at her friend, and could not avoid thinking that her appearance justified the remark; but it was so different from the Maria of old times, that she hastened to ask her if she was sick.

The company, meanwhile, had begun to get over a little of the stiffness usually attendant on such occasions. The gentlemen left the sides of the room, where they had all been sitting together talking, and apparently much interested in each other, yet casting longing glances towards their fair friends, who appeared equally oblivious of the male portion of the party.

They seemed at once now to enter into the spirit of the evening, and games, for it would have shocked the orthodox notions of the good people of Mr. Hammond's society if dancing had been introduced, followed thick and fast.

Kitchen Furniture was called for, and, assuming the names of various articles, tongs, broom boots, &c., were obliged to rise up, amid laughter and merry jests.

Grocery Store next came, and Pork was seen in the shape of some fair girl, exchanging places with Cabbage, in the person of Ned Sidney, who seemed rather unwilling to give up his seat by the side of Virginia.

Beans, as Mr. Somers was called for the time being, seemed equally ambitious of a seat by her side, and many were the jests of the company, on the fondness of these gentlemen for Molasses, which was her cognomen.

Jenny appeared to be in her element, casting sly glances at the faces of her two admirers, and welcoming each to her side with the same sweet smile and arch words.

Maria too, to Esther's great satisfaction, seemed to have roused herself from her listless state, and animation, which alone was wanting to render her beautiful, now sparkled in her eyes and beamed in her smile. Admirers of her were not wanting, but she seemed to repulse every attention quietly and kindly, but in so marked a manner, that she was soon left to herself.

Blindfold was now proposed, and Dr. Manning, with Mrs. Somers and a few of the older people who had remained, though they had adjourned to another room for a quiet chat, now united with the younger members of the circle in clearing the room for action, as he said. Chairs, tables, mirrors and sofas were hurried out into the large entry, and Dr. Manning was first blinded. Emily tied the bandage over his eyes and, admonishing him to "turn round three times and catch who you may," darted from his side.

Now what scampering from one side of the room to the other followed! Then what profound silence as one was caught, while the Doctor vainly attempted to guess whom he had taken.

"You all wear your hair alike, I believe," he said, "but I guess it is Emily Sidney."

His guess proved correct, and, amid her declarations that she really believed that he could see, while he laughingly assured her, that if so, it was her own fault, as she had tied on the handkerchief, she assumed his place. Again the scampering ensued, and the fall of one or two was greeted with shouts of laughter, as each declared that he was unhurt. Suddenly the door opened, and Mr. Templeton entered just in season to be caught by Emily, who guessed him at once. Many were the pleasant sallies which this called forth, but he declined being blindfolded, as he had just come in from the cold.

After a few more had been blinded, the party were all pretty tired, and quite ready to partake of the refreshments, apples, nuts, and raisins, which were now brought in. Apples were now named, causing many blushes, until at last it came to Virginia's turn.

"Who did you name mine?" she asked of the company.

"Mr. Somers," replied one; "Mr. Sidney," said the rest; and so it was repeated until it came to Dr. Manning.

"If I were not a married man," he said, smiling, "I should be tempted to name it, myself; but as it is, I will follow the example already set me, naming it both Mr. Somers and Mr. Sidney, and leave the selection to you."

"How may seeds?" cried all, as she put the little shining specks into her white hand.

"Five, I declare," said she, very demurely, "Five,

I cast away;" and she glanced archly at the rivals, who were close by her side.

Phillipines were now passed round, a game in which all took part. Other games were now proposed, in which Mr. Templeton did not join, for, unperceived, he had slipped out to have a conversation with Mrs. Manning, Mr. Hammond, and his wife, who were in an adjoining apartment.

"He never will play these games," said Emily to Esther, as she noticed his absence.

"I declare, it is eleven o'clock!" exclaimed Emily, as the tones of the old Dutch clock rang out full and clear; "we must go home."

Already shawled and hooded, the girls had bid Mrs. Manning good night, assuring her that they had enjoyed themselves finely. Esther noticed that Virginia stood by the side of Edward Sidney, when Mr. Somers, not observing this, proposed accompanying her home.

"Unfortunately," replied she, in a very low tone, "I am already provided for."

He bowed, and sought Maria, with whom he was more successful.

Edward had been talking to one of his friends; but, by the quick flush of his cheek, Esther saw that Virginia's words had been overheard.

"I am sorry," said he, "to be the *unfortunate cause* of depriving you of so much pleasanter an escort than I can hope to be."

"Pshaw, Edward! don't make yourself ridiculous!" The words were sharp, but spoken in a low, almost

tender tone. It was the first time that she had ever called him Edward. It seemed to have been involuntary; for she added, after a short pause, "Excuse me, Mr. Sidney."

"It is an offence I would gladly have you repeat," he replied.

"Then let us be henceforth Virginia and Edward to each other," was her reply, as they walked slowly homeward.

After this evening Mr. Somers and a Mr. Dunmore, who had seemed quite pleased with Esther, having attached himself to her very devotedly the whole evening, and having been permitted to "see her home," as he expressed it, were frequent visitors at Deacon Sidney's.

Mr. Dunmore was a small, dapper man, remarkable for nothing but his gentlemanly manners, good connections, and regular features; but he considered these qualifications as all-sufficient, and had so good an opinion of himself, that it was unnecessary for others to waste their admiration upon him. So Esther said, when she was complimented on her new admirer. He was indefatigable in his attentions, and construed every repulse which he met with from her—and they were not few—as owing merely to maiden timidity. It was in vain that she attempted to shake him off; he was as constant as her shadow.

"He really appears impudent," she declared, half vexed, to Emily. "I cannot step out to the door, but his smile and bow greet me."

At last she relapsed into a passive state of endu-

rance, hoping that he would, ere long, give her an opportunity of expressing her opinion of his merits, and to free herself from further annoyance.

Virginia, meanwhile, had fully proved her claim to the titles of both belle and coquette. She treated Edward and Mr. Somers in the same capricious manner. While one basked in her smiles, the other was chilled by her petulant manner; and just as the favored lover was hoping that his regard was returned, lo! he must take his turn in experiencing her apparent indifference, and see his rival in the enjoyment of the gracious smiles, which he had so lately thought were his alone.

At such times Ned would assume as haughty a manner as her own. Engaged in attentions to Maria, he would strive to appear unconscious of the fact that Virginia, absorbed in listening to Mr. Somers, was apparently forgetful of all but the pleasure of his society.

But Virginia was not so easily deceived. She would take no notice of Edward's scornful smiles until it suited her sovereign pleasure; then she would request some trifling favor of him, and, while he was thus engaged, retaining all his frostiness of manner, she would throw so much sweetness and reproach into her glance, as she thanked him, and whisper, "Don't be foolish, Edward! are you angry with your friend Virginia?" that he could not but be won by her smiles.

"I am a fool, Virginia," said he, on one of these occasions, "to trust to you; and as I am afraid that I

shall always remain one till I have you, I shall go away soon."

Jennie would pay no heed to any such remark. She seemed to take it for granted that it was her friendship, not her love, that he sought; and, putting her hand playfully over his lips, would reply, "Now, if you are going to look dignified, and scold, I won't talk with you another moment; I'll go and talk with Ned Somers; he's never so cross."

"Go, if you choose," was Edward's cool reply; but, nevertheless, he would drop the offending subject, and Virginia would ride with him, play his favorite songs, listen while he read to her—in short, manage to have him ever at her side till the wind changed: and poor Mr. Somers, who was so deeply in love that he could not, as Edward did, retaliate, by devoting himself to another, but, in a perfectly wretched state, watched her manœuvres, unhappy in her society, and unable to leave her, was received again, most graciously, as a dear friend; for she persisted in having no lovers, misunderstanding every lover-like allusion put into words, but not at all chary of love's unspoken language.

Mr. Templeton, who was also a constant visitor at Deacon Sidney's, looked with indignation at such a course of conduct, and urged Ned to say nothing to her; a resolution which he formed every few days, and which he broke as regularly. Mr. Templeton himself treated her with marked displeasure; and while he talked much with Esther, Emily and Maria, bestowed very little attention on Jennie. For this, however, she appeared to care very little. She

glanced at him with a saucy look, as if she would say, "I could have *you*, too, under my thumb, if I thought you worth the trouble."

Almost every evening he read aloud to the girls while they sewed; and it was to Esther he appealed, when he found something to praise or to condemn. She understood him; and though they differed often in their opinions, Mr. Templeton seemed to enjoy quarrelling with her, as Emily called it.

Esther could not help admiring the firmness, good sense, and candor, with which he defended his side of the question, and his kindness and consideration, which he displayed in various ways. He seemed to understand her dislike to Mr. Dunmore, and often interposed himself between her and her tormentor. In this way they were thrown much together, and a more intimate acquaintance showed each much to admire in the other.

Virginia still retained her place in the affections of Mrs. Sidney; for that lady, not very clear-sighted, had seen none of her capricious treatment of her son; and as long as she praised him, which she frequently did, his mother saw no obstacle to the hopes of Edward, which he had hinted to her.

Aunt Mary said nothing; but Esther felt that the calm kindness of her manner towards Jennie was very different from the deep tenderness of her eye and voice, which she betrayed towards Maria and herself.