

The Monk

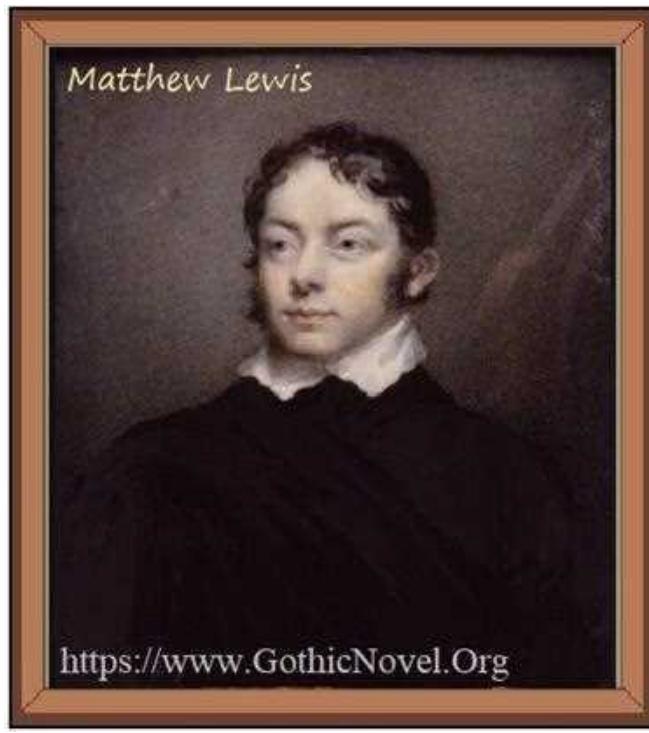
by Mathew G. Lewis

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PREFACE NOTE

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THE MONK.

By M. G. LEWIS.

CHAPTER I.

While in each other's arms entranced they lay,
They blessed the night, and cursed the coming day.

LEE.



HE burst of transport was passed: Ambrosio's lust was satisfied. Pleasure fled, and Shame usurped her seat in his bosom. Confused and terrified at his weakness, he drew himself from Matilda's arms: his perjury presented itself before him: he reflected on the scene which had been acted, and trembled at the consequences of a discovery: he looked forward with horror: his heart was despondent, and became the abode of satiety and disgust: He avoided the eyes of his partner in frailty. A melancholy silence prevailed, during which both seemed busied with disagreeable reflections.

Matilda was the first to break it. She took his

hand gently, and pressed it to her burning lips.

"Ambrosia!" she murmured, in a soft and trembling voice.

The abbot started at the sound: he turned his eyes upon Matilda's; they were filled with tears; her cheeks were covered with blushes, and her supplicating looks seemed to solicit his compassion.

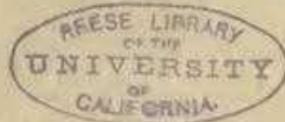
"Dangerous woman!" said he; "into what an abyss of misery have you plunged me! Should your sex be discovered, my honour, nay, my life, must pay for the pleasure of a few moments. Fool that I was, to trust myself to your seductions! What can now be done? How can my offence be expiated? What atonement can purchase the pardon of my crime? Wretched Matilda, you have destroyed my quiet for ever!"

"To me these reproaches, Ambrosio? to me, who have sacrificed for you the world's pleasures, the luxury of wealth, the delicacy of sex, my friends, my fortune, and my fame? What have you lost which I preserved? Have *I* not shared in *your* guilt? Have *you* not shared in *my* pleasure? Guilt did I say? In what consists ours, unless in the opinion of an ill-judging world? Let that world be ignorant of them, and our joys become divine and blameless! Unnatural were your vows of celibacy; man was not created for such a state: and were love a crime, God would never have made it so sweet, so irresistible! Then banish

those clouds from your brow, my Ambrosio. Indulge in those pleasures freely, without which life is a worthless gift. Cease to reproach me with having taught you what is bliss, and feel equal transports with the woman who adores you!"

As she spoke, her eyes filled with a delicious langour: her bosom panted: she twined her arms voluptuously round him, drew him towards her, and glued her lips to his. Ambrosio again raged with desire: the die was thrown: his vows were already broken: he had already committed the crime, and why should he refrain from enjoying its reward? He clasped her to his breast with redoubled ardour. No longer repressed by the sense of shame, he gave a loose to his intemperate appetites; while the fair wanton put every invention of lust in practice, every refinement in the art of pleasure, which might heighten the bliss of her possession, and render her lover's transports still more exquisite. Ambrosio rioted in delights till then unknown to him. Swift fled the night, and the morning blushed to behold him still clasped in the embraces of Matilda.

Intoxicated with pleasure, the monk rose from the syren's luxurious couch: he no longer reflected with shame upon his incontinence, or dreaded the vengeance of offended heaven: his only fear was lest death should rob him of enjoyments, for which his long fast had



only given a keener edge to his appetite. Matilda was still under the influence of poison; and the voluptuous monk trembled less for his preserver's life than his concubine's. Deprived of her, he would not easily find another mistress with whom he could indulge his passions so fully, and so safely; he therefore pressed her with earnestness to use the means of preservation which she had declared to be in her possession.

"Yes!" replied Matilda; "since you have made me feel that life is valuable, I will rescue mine at any rate. No dangers shall appal me: I will look upon the consequences of my action boldly, nor shudder at the horrors which they present: I will think my sacrifice scarcely worthy to purchase your possession; and remember, that a moment passed in your arms in this world, o'erpays an age of punishment in the next. But before I take this step, Ambrosio, give me your solemn oath never to enquire by what means I shall preserve myself."

He did so, in a manner the most binding.

"I thank you, my beloved. This precaution is necessary; for, though you know it not, you are under the command of vulgar prejudices. The business on which I must be employed this night might startle you, from its singularity, and lower me in your opinion. Tell me, are you possessed of the key of the low door on the western side of the garden?"

"The door which opens into the burying-ground common to us and the sisterhood of St. Clare? I have not the key, but can easily procure it."

"You have only this to do. Admit me into the burying-ground at midnight. Watch while I descend into the vaults of St. Clare, lest some prying eye should observe my actions. Leave me there alone for an hour, and that life is safe which I dedicate to your pleasures. To prevent creating suspicion, do not visit me during the day. Remember the key, and that I expect you before twelve. Hark! I hear steps approaching! Leave me, I will pretend to sleep."

The friar obeyed, and left the cell. As he opened the door, father Pablos made his appearance.

"I come, said the latter, "to enquire after the health of my young patient."

"Hush!" replied Ambrosio, laying his finger upon his lip; "speak softly; I am just come from him; he has fallen into a profound slumber, which doubtless will be of service to him. Do not disturb him at present, for he wishes to repose."

Father Pablos obeyed, and, hearing the bell ring, accompanied the abbot to matins. Ambrosio felt embarrassed as he entered the chapel. Guilt was new to him, and he fancied that every eye could read the transactions of the night upon his countenance. He strove to pray: his bosom no longer glowed with

devotion: his thoughts insensibly wandered to Matilda's secret charms. But what he wanted in purity of heart, he supplied by exterior sanctity. The better to cloak his transgression he redoubled his pretensions to the semblance of virtue, and never appeared more devoted to heaven than since he had broken through his engagements. Thus did he unconsciously add hypocrisy to perjury and incontinence: he had fallen into the latter errors from yielding to seduction almost irresistible: but he was now guilty of a voluntary fault, by endeavouring to conceal those into which another had betrayed him.

The matins concluded, Ambrosio retired to his cell. The pleasures which he had just tasted for the first time were still impressed upon his mind: his brain was bewildered, and presented a confused chaos of remorse, voluptuousness, inquietude, and fear: he looked back with regret to that peace of soul, that security of virtue, which till then had been his portion: he had indulged in excesses whose very idea, but four-and-twenty hours before, he had recoiled at with horror: he shuddered at reflecting that a trifling indiscretion on his part, or on Matilda's, would overturn that fabric of reputation which it had cost him thirty years to erect, and render him the abhorrence of that people of whom he was then the idol. Conscience painted to him in glaring colours his perjury and weakness;

apprehension magnified to him the horrors of punishment, and he already fancied himself in the prisons of the Inquisition. To these tormenting ideas succeeded Matilda's beauty, and those delicious lessons, which once learnt can never be forgotten. A single glance thrown upon these reconciled him with himself: he considered the pleasures of the former night to have been purchased at an easy price by the sacrifice of innocence and honour. Their very remembrance filled his soul with ecstacy: he cursed his foolish vanity, which had induced him to waste in obscurity the bloom of life, ignorant of the blessings of love and woman: he determined, at all events, to continue his commerce with Matilda, and called every argument to his aid which might confirm his resolution: he asked himself, provided his irregularity was unknown, in what would his fault consist, and what consequences he had to apprehend? By adhering strictly to every rule of his order save chastity, he doubted not to retain the esteem of men, and even the protection of heaven; he trusted easily to be forgiven so slight and natural a deviation from his vows; but he forgot that, having pronounced those vows, incontinence, in laymen the most venial of errors, became in his person the most heinous of crimes.

Once decided upon his future conduct, his mind became more easy: he threw himself upon his bed, and

strode by sleeping to recruit his strength, exhausted by his nocturnal excesses. He awoke refreshed, and eager for a repetition of his pleasures. Obedient to Matilda's order, he visited not her cell during the day. Father Pablos mentioned in the refectory that Rosario had at length been prevailed upon to follow his prescription; but that the medicine had not produced the slightest effect, and that he believed no mortal skill, could rescue him from the grave. With this opinion the abbot agreed, and affected to lament the untimely fate of a youth whose talents had appeared so promising.

The night arrived. Ambrosio had taken care to procure from the porter the key of the low door opening into the cemetery. Furnished with this, when all was silent in the monastery, he quitted his cell, and and hastened to Matilda's. She had left her bed and was ready dressed before his arrival.

"I have been expecting you with impatience," said she; "my life depends upon these moments. Have you the key?"

"I have."

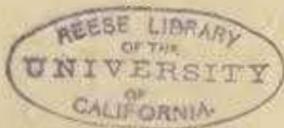
"Away then to the garden. We have no time to lose. Follow me!"

She took a small covered basket from the table. Bearing this in one hand, and the lamp, which was flaming upon the hearth, in the other, she hastened from the cell. Ambrosio followed her. Both maintained

a profound silence. She moved on with quick but cautious steps, passed through the cloisters, and reached the western side of the garden: her eyes flashed with a fire and wildness which impressed the monk at once with awe and horror. A determined desperate courage reigned upon her brow: she gave the lamp to Ambrosio; then taking from him the key, she unlocked the low door, and entered the cemetery. It was a vast and spacious square, planted with yew trees; half of it belonged to the abbey, the other half was the property of the sisterhood of St. Clare, and was protected by a roof of stone: the division was marked by an iron railing, the wicket of which was generally left unlocked.

Thither Matilda bent her course; she opened the wicket, and sought for the door leading to the subterraneous vaults where reposed the mouldering bodies of the votaries of St. Clare. The night was perfectly dark; neither moon nor stars were visible. Luckily there was not a breath of wind, and the friar bore his lamp in full security: by the assistance of its beams, the door of the sepulchre was soon discovered. It was sunk within the hollow of a wall, and almost concealed by thick festoons of ivy hanging over it. Three steps of rough-hewn stone conducted to it, and Matilda was on the point of descending them, when she suddenly started back.

“There are people in the vaults!” she whispered



to the monk; "conceal yourself till they are passed."

She took refuge behind a lofty and magnificent tomb, erected in honour of the convent's foundress. Ambrosio followed her example, carefully hiding his lamp, lest its beams should betray them. But a few moments had elapsed when the door was pushed open leading to the subterraneous caverns. Rays of light proceeded up the stair-case: they enabled the concealed spectators to observe two females dressed in religious habits, who seemed engaged in earnest conversation. The abbot had no difficulty to recognise the prioress of St. Clare in the first, and one of the elder nuns in her companion.

"Everything is prepared," said the prioress: "her fate shall be decided to-morrow; all her tears and sighs will be unavailing. No! In five-and-twenty years that I have been superior of this convent, never did I witness a transaction more infamous!"

"You must expect much opposition to your will," the other replied in a milder voice: "Agnes has many friends in the convent, and in particular the mother St. Ursula will espouse her cause most warmly. In truth, she merits to have friends; and I wish I could prevail upon you to consider her youth, and her peculiar situation. She seems sensible of her fault; the excess of her grief proves her penitence, and I am convinced that her tears flow more from contrition

than fear of punishment. Reverend mother, would you be persuaded to mitigate the severity of your sentence; would you but deign to overlook this first transgression; I offer myself as the pledge of her future conduct."

"Overlook it, say you? Mother Camilla, you amaze me! What? -after disgracing me in the presence of Madrid's idol, of the very man on whom I most wished to impress an idea of the strictness of my discipline? How despicable must I have appeared to the reverend abbot! No, mother, no! I never can forgive the insult. I cannot better convince Ambrosio that I abhor such crimes, than by punishing that of Agnes with all the rigour of which our severe laws admit. Cease then your supplications, they will all be unavailing. My resolution is taken. To-morrow Agnes shall be made a terrible example of my justice and resentment."

The mother Camilla seemed not to give up the point, but by this time the nuns were out of hearing. The prioress unlocked the door which communicated with St. Clare's Chapel, and, having entered with her companion, closed it again after them.

Matilda now asked, who was this Agnes with whom the prioress was thus incensed, and what connection she could have with Ambrosio. He related her adventure; and he added, that since that time his

ideas having undergone a thorough revolution, he now felt much compassion for the unfortunate nun.

"I design," said he, "to request an audience of the domina to-morrow, and use every means of obtaining a mitigation of her sentence."

"Beware of what you do," interrupted Matilda; "your sudden change of sentiment may naturally create surprise, and may give birth to suspicions which it is most our interest to avoid. Rather redouble your outward austerity, and thunder out menaces against the errors of others, the better to conceal your own. Abandon the nun to her fate. Your interfering might be dangerous, and her imprudence merits to be punished: she is unworthy to enjoy love's pleasures, who has not wit enough to conceal them. But in discussing this trivial subject I waste moments which are precious. The night flies apace, and much must be done before morning. The nuns are retired, all is safe. Give me the lamp Ambrosio, I must descend alone into these caverns: wait here, and if any one approaches warn me by your voice; but as you value your existence, presume not to follow me: your life would fall a victim to your imprudent curiosity."

Thus saying, she advanced towards the sepulchre, still holding her lamp in one hand, and her little basket in the other. She touched the door: it turned slowly upon its grating hinges, and a narrow winding staircase

of black marble presented itself to her eyes. She descended it; Ambrosio remained above, watching the faint beams of the lamp, as they still receded down the stairs. They disappeared, and he found himself in total darkness.

Left to himself, he could not reflect without surprise on the sudden change in Matilda's character and sentiments. But a few days had passed since she appeared the mildest and softest of her sex, devoted to his will, and looking up to him as a superior being. Now she assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse, but ill calculated to please him. She spoke no longer to insinuate, but command: he found himself unable to cope with her argument, and was unwillingly obliged to confess the superiority of her judgment. Every moment convinced him of the astonishing powers of her mind; but what she gained in the opinion of the man, she lost with interest in the affection of the lover. He regretted Rosario, the fond, the gentle, and submissive; he grieved that Matilda preferred the virtues of his sex to those of her own; and when he thought of her expressions respecting the devoted nun, he could not help blaming them as cruel and unfeminine. Pity is a sentiment so natural, so appropriate to the female character, that it is scarcely a merit for a woman to possess it, but to be without it is a grievous crime. Ambrosio could not easily forgive

his mistress for being deficient in this amiable quality. However, though he blamed her insensibility, he felt the truth of her observations; and though he pitied sincerely the unfortunate Agnes, he resolved to drop the idea of interposing in her behalf.

Near an hour had elapsed since Matilda descended into the caverns; still she returned not. Ambrosio's curiosity was excited. He drew near the staircase—he listened—all was silent, except at intervals he caught the sound of Matilda's voice, as it wound along the subterraneous passages, and was re-echoed by the sepulchre's vaulted roofs. She was at too great a distance for him to distinguish her words, and ere they reached him, they were deadened in a low murmur. He longed to penetrate into this mystery. He resolved to disobey her injunctions, and follow her into the cavern. He advanced to the staircase; he had already descended some steps, when his courage failed him. He remembered Matilda's menaces if he infringed her orders, and his bosom was filled with a secret unaccountable awe. He returned up the stairs, resumed his former station, and waited impatiently for the conclusion of this adventure.

Suddenly he was sensible of a violent shock. An earthquake rocked the ground, the columns which supported the roof under which he stood, were so strongly shaken, that every moment menaced him

with its fall, and at the same moment he heard a loud and tremendous burst of thunder; it ceased, and his eyes being fixed upon the staircase, he saw a bright column of light flash along the caverns beneath. It was seen but for an instant. No sooner did it disappear, than all was once more quiet and obscure. Profound darkness again surrounded him, and the silence of night was only broken by the whirring bat as she flitted slowly by him.

With every instant Ambrosio's amazement increased. Another hour elapsed, after which the same light again appeared, and was lost again as suddenly. It was accompanied by a strain of sweet but solemn music, which, as it stole through the vaults below, inspired the monk with mingled delight and terror. It had not long been hushed, when he heard Matilda's steps upon the staircase. She ascended from the cavern; the most lively joy animated her beautiful features.

"Did you see anything?" she asked.

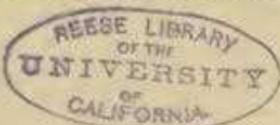
"Twice I saw a column of light flash up the staircase."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"The morning is on the point of breaking: let us retire to the abbey, lest daylight should betray us."

With a light step she hastened from the burying-



ground. She regained her cell, and the curious abbot still accompanied her. She closed the door, and disembarrassed herself of her lamp and basket.

"I have succeeded!" she cried, throwing herself upon his bosom; "succeeded beyond my fondest hopes! I shall live, Ambrosio, shall live for you! The step which I shuddered at taking, proves to me a source of joys inexpressible! Oh! that I dared communicate those joys to you! Oh! that I were permitted to share with you my power, and raise you as high above the level of your sex, as one bold deed has exalted me above mine!"

"And what prevents you, Matilda?" interrupted the friar. "Why is your business in the cavern made a secret? Do you think me undeserving of your confidence? Matilda, I must doubt the truth of your affection, while you have joys in which I am forbidden to share."

"You reproach me with injustice; I grieve sincerely that I am obliged to conceal from you my happiness: but I am not to blame; the fault lies not in me but in yourself, my Ambrosio. You are still too much the monk, your mind is enslaved by the prejudices of education; and superstition might make you shudder at the idea of that which experience has taught me to prize and value. At present you are unfit to be trusted with a secret of such importance; but the strength of

your judgment, and the curiosity which I rejoice to see sparkling in your eyes, make me hope that you will one day deserve my confidence. Till that period arrives, restrain your impatience. Remember that you have given me your solemn oath never to enquire into this night's adventures. I insist upon your keeping this oath; for, though," she added smiling, while she sealed his lips with a wanton kiss, "though I forgive your breaking your vows to heaven, I expect you to keep your vows to me."

The friar returned the embrace, which had set his blood on fire. The luxurious and unbounded excesses of the former night were renewed, and they separated not till the bell rang for matins.

The same pleasures were frequently repeated. The monks rejoiced in the feigned Rosario's unexpected recovery, and none of them suspected his real sex. The abbot possessed his mistress in tranquility, and, perceiving his frailty unsuspected, abandoned himself to his passions in full security. Shame and remorse no longer tormented him. Frequent repetitions made him familiar with sin, and his bosom became proof against the stings of conscience. In these sentiments he was encouraged by Matilda; but she soon was aware that she had satiated her lover by the unbounded freedom of her caresses. Her charms becoming accustomed to him, they ceased to excite the same

desires which at first they had inspired. The delirium of passion being past, he had leisure to observe every trifling defect; where none were to be found, satiety made him fancy them. The monk was glutted with the fulness of pleasure. A week had scarcely elapsed, before he wearied of his paramour: his warm constitution still made him seek in her arms the gratification of his lust. But when the moment of passion was over, he quitted her with disgust, and his humour, naturally inconstant, made him sigh impatiently for variety.

Possession, which cloys man, only increases the affection of women. Matilda with every succeeding day grew more attached to the friar. Since he had obtained her favours, he was become dearer to her than ever, and she felt grateful to him for the pleasures in which they had equally been sharers. Unfortunately, as her passion grew ardent, Ambrosio's grew cold; the very marks of her fondness excited his disgust, and its excess served to extinguish the flame which already burned but feebly in his bosom. Matilda could not but remark that her society seemed to him daily less agreeable; he was inattentive while she spoke; her musical talents, which she possessed in perfection, had lost the power of amusing him; or, if he deigned to praise them, his compliments were evidently forced and cold. He no longer gazed upon her with affection,

or applauded her sentiments with a lover's partiality. This Matilda well perceived, and redoubled her efforts to revive those sentiments which he had once felt. She could not but fail, since he considered as importunities, the pains which she took to please him, and was disgusted by the very means which she used to recall the wanderer. Still, however, their illicit commerce continued; but it was clear that he was led to her arms, not by love, but the cravings of brutal appetite. His constitution made a woman necessary to him, and Matilda was the only one with whom he could indulge his passions safely. In spite of her beauty, he gazed upon every other female with more desire; but fearing that his hypocrisy should be made public, he confined his inclinations to his own breast.

It was by no means his nature to be timid: but his education had impressed his mind with fear so strongly, that apprehension was become part of his character. Had his youth been passed in the world, he would have shown himself possessed of many brilliant and manly qualities. He was naturally enterprising, firm, and fearless: he had a warrior's heart, and he might have shone with splendour at the head of an army. There was no want of generosity in his nature: the wretched never failed to find him a compassionate auditor: his abilities were quick and shining, and his judgment vast, solid, and decisive. With such quali-

fications he would have been an ornament to his country: that he possessed them he had given proofs in his earliest infancy, and his parents had beheld his dawning virtues with the fondest delight and admiration. Unfortunately, while yet a child, he was deprived of those parents. He fell into the power of a relation, whose only wish about him was never to hear of him more: for that purpose he gave him in charge to his friend, the former superior of the Capuchins. The abbot, a very monk, used all his endeavours to persuade the boy that happiness existed not without the walls of a convent. He succeeded fully. To deserve admittance into the order of St. Francis was Ambrosio's highest ambition. His instructors carefully repressed those virtues, whose grandeur and disinterestedness were ill suited to the cloister. Instead of universal benevolence, he adopted a selfish partiality for his own particular establishment; he was taught to consider compassion for the errors of others as a crime of the blackest dye: the noble frankness of his temper was exchanged for servile humility; and in order to break his natural spirit, the monks terrified his young mind, by placing before him all the horrors with which superstition could furnish them: they painted to him the torments of the damned in colours the most dark, terrible and fantastic, and threatened him at the slightest fault with eternal perdition. No wonder that

his imagination constantly dwelling upon these fearful objects should have rendered his character timid and apprehensive. Add to this, that his long absence from the great world, and total unacquaintance with the common dangers of life, made him form of them an idea far more dismal than the reality. While the monks were busied in rooting out his virtues, and narrowing his sentiments, they allowed every vice which had fallen to his share to arrive at full perfection. He was suffered to be proud, vain, ambitious, and disdainful: he was jealous of his equals, and despised all merit but his own: he was implacable when offended, and cruel in his revenge. Still, in spite of the pains taken to pervert them, his natural good qualities would occasionally break through the gloom cast over them so carefully. At such times the contest for superiority between his real and acquired character was striking and unaccountable to those unacquainted with his original disposition. He pronounced the most severe sentences upon offenders, which the moment after compassion induced him to mitigate: he undertook the most daring enterprises, which the fear of their consequences soon obliged him to abandon: his inborn genius darted a brilliant light upon subjects the most obscure; and almost instantaneously his superstition replunged them in darkness more profound than that from which they had just been rescued. His brother

monks, regarding him as a superior being, remarked not this contradiction in their idol's conduct. They were persuaded that what he did must be right, and supposed him to have good reasons for changing his resolutions. The fact was, that the different sentiments with which education and nature had inspired him, were combating in his bosom: it remained for his passions, which as yet no opportunity had called into play, to decide the victory. Unfortunately his passions were the worst judges to whom he could possibly have applied. His monastic seclusion had till now been in his favour, since it gave him no room for discovering his bad qualities. The superiority of his talents raised him too far above his companions to permit his being jealous of them: his exemplary piety, persuasive eloquence, and pleasing manners had secured him universal esteem, and consequently he had no injuries to revenge; his ambition was justified by his acknowledged merit, and his pride considered as no more than proper confidence. He never saw, much less conversed with the other sex: he was ignorant of the pleasures in woman's power to bestow; and if he read in the course of his studies

"That men were fond, he smiled, and wondered how."

For a time spare diet, frequent watching, and severe penance cooled and repressed the natural warmth of

his constitution: but no sooner did opportunity present itself, no sooner did he catch a glimpse of joys to which he was still a stranger than religion's barriers were too feeble to resist the overwhelming torrent of his desires. All impediments yielded before the force of his temperament, warm, sanguine, and voluptuous in the excess. As yet his other passions lay dormant; but they only needed to be once awakened to display themselves with violence as great and irresistible.

He continued to be the admiration of Madrid. The enthusiasm created by his eloquence seemed rather to increase than diminish. Every Thursday, which was the only day when he appeared in public, the Capuchin cathedral was crowded with auditors, and his discourse was always received with the same approbation. He was named confessor to all the chief families in Madrid; and no one was counted fashionable who was enjoined penance by any other than Ambrosio. In his resolution of never stirring out of his convent he still persisted. This circumstance created a still greater opinion of his sanctity and self denial. Above all, the women sang forth his praises loudly, less influenced by devotion than by his noble countenance, majestic air, and well-turned graceful figure. The abbey-door was thronged with carriages from morning to night; the noblest and fairest dames of Madrid confessed to the abbot their secret peccadilloes. The eyes of the luxurious friar devoured

their charms. Had his penitents consulted these interpreters, he would have needed no other means of expressing his desires. For his misfortune, they were so strongly persuaded of his continence, that the possibility of his harbouring indecent thoughts never once entered their imaginations. The climate's heat, 'tis well known, operates with no small influence upon the constitutions of the Spanish ladies: but the most abandoned would have thought it an easier task to inspire with passion the marble statue of St. Francis than the cold and rigid heart of the immaculate Ambrosio.

On his part, the friar was little acquainted with the depravity of the world: he suspected not that but few of his penitents would have rejected his addresses. Yet had he been better instructed on this head, the danger attending such an attempt would have sealed up his lips in silence. He knew that it would be difficult for a woman to keep a secret so strange and so important as his frailty; and he even trembled, lest Matilda should betray him. Anxious to preserve a reputation which was infinitely dear to him, he saw all the risk of committing it to the power of some vain giddy female; and as the beauties of Madrid affected only his senses without touching his heart, he forgot them as soon as they were out of his sight. The danger of discovery, the fear of being repulsed,

the loss of reputation; all these considerations counselled him to stifle his desires; and though he now felt for it the most perfect indifference, he was necessitated to confine himself to Matilda's person.

One morning, the confluence of penitents was greater than usual. He was detained in the confessional chair till a late hour. At length the crowd was dispatched, and he prepared to quit the chapel, when two females entered, and drew near him with humility. They threw up their veils, and the youngest entreated him to listen to her for a few moments. The melody of her voice, of that voice to which no man ever listened without interest, immediately caught Ambrosio's attention. He stopped. The petitioner seemed bowed down with affliction: her cheeks were pale, her eyes dimmed with tears, and her hair fell in disorder over her face and bosom. Still her countenance was so sweet, so innocent, so heavenly, as might have charmed an heart less susceptible than that which panted in the abbot's breast. With more than usual softness of manner he desired her to proceed, and heard her speak as follows, with an emotion which increased every moment:

"Reverend father, you see an unfortunate threatened with the loss of her dearest, of almost her only friend! My mother, my excellent mother lies upon the bed of sickness. A sudden and dreadful malady

seized her last night, and so rapid has been its progress that the physicians despair of her life. Human aid fails me; nothing remains for me but to implore the mercy of heaven. Father, all Madrid rings with the report of your piety and virtue. Deign to remember my mother in your prayers: perhaps they may prevail on the Almighty to spare her; and should that be the case, I engage myself every Thursday in the next three months to illuminate the shrine of St. Francis in his honour."

"So!" thought the monk; "here we have a second Vincentio della Ronda. Rosario's adventure began thus;" and he wished secretly that this might have the same conclusion.

He acceded to the request. The petitioner returned him thanks with every mark of gratitude, and then continued:

"I have yet another favour to ask. We are strangers in Madrid: my mother needs a confessor, and knows not to whom she should apply. We understand that you never quit the abbey, and, alas! my poor mother is unable to come hither! If you would have the goodness, reverend father, to name a proper person, whose wise and pious consolations may soften the agonies of my parent's death-bed, you will confer an everlasting favour upon hearts not ungrateful."

With this petition also the monk complied. Indeed,

what petition would he have refused, if urged in such enchanting accents? The suppliant was so interesting! Her voice was so sweet, so harmonious! Her very tears became her, and her affliction seemed to add new lustre to her charms. He promised to send to her a confessor that same evening, and begged her to leave her address. The companion presented him with a card on which it was written, and then withdrew with the fair petitioner, who pronounced before her departure a thousand benedictions on the abbot's goodness. His eyes followed her out of the chapel. It was not till she was out of sight that he examined the card, on which he read the following words:

"*Donna Elvira Dalfa, strada di San Iago, four doors from the palace d'Albornos.*"

The suppliant was no other than Antonia, and Leonella was her companion. The latter had not consented without difficulty to accompany her niece to the abbey: Ambrosio had inspired her with such awe, that she trembled at the very sight of him. Her fears had conquered even her natural loquacity, and while in his presence she uttered not a single syllable.

The monk retired to his cell, whither he was pursued by Antonia's image. He felt a thousand new emotions springing in his bosom, and he trembled to examine into the cause which gave them birth. They were totally different from those inspired by Matilda, when

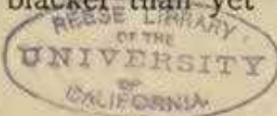
she first declared her sex and her affection. He felt not the provocation of lust; no voluptuous desires rioted in his bosom: nor did a burning imagination picture to him the charms which modesty had veiled from his eyes. On the contrary, what he now felt was a mingled sentiment of tenderness, admiration, and respect. A soft and delicious melancholy infused itself into his soul, and he would not have exchanged it for the most lively transports of joy. Society now disgusted him: he delighted in solitude, which permitted his indulging the visions of fancy: his thoughts were all gentle, sad, and soothing; and the whole wide world presented him with no other object than Antonia.

“Happy man!” he exclaimed in his romantic enthusiasm, “happy man, who is destined to possess the heart of that lovely girl! what delicacy in her features! what elegance in her form! how enchanting was the timid innocence of her eyes! and how different from the wanton expression, the wild luxurious fire, which sparkles in Matilda’s! Oh! sweeter must one kiss be, snatched from the rosy lips of the first, than all the full and lustful favours bestowed so freely by the second. Matilda gluts me with enjoyment even to loathing, forces me to her arms, apes the harlot, and glories in her prostitution. Disgusting! Did she know the inexpressible charm of modesty, how irresistibly it enthrals the heart of man, how firmly it chains

him to the throne of beauty, she never would have thrown it off. What would be too dear a price for this lovely girl's affections? What would I refuse to sacrifice, could I be released from my vows, and permitted to declare my love in the sight of earth and heaven? While I strove to inspire her with tenderness, with friendship and esteem, how tranquil and undisturbed would the hours roll away! Gracious God! to see her blue downcast eyes beam upon mine with timid fondness! to sit for days, for years, listening to that gentle voice! to acquire the right of obliging her, and hear the artless expressions of her gratitude! to watch the emotions of that spotless heart! to encourage each dawning virtue! to share in her joy when happy, to kiss away her tears when distressed, and to see her fly to my arms for comfort and support! Yes; if there is perfect bliss on earth, 'tis his lot alone who becomes that angel's husband."

While his fancy coined these ideas, he paced his cell with a disordered air. His eyes were fixed upon vacancy: his head reclined upon his shoulder: a tear rolled down his cheek, while he reflected that the vision of happiness for him could never be realized.

"She is lost to me;" he continued, "by marriage she cannot be mine: and to seduce such innocence, to use the confidence reposed in me to work her ruin— Oh! it would be a crime, blacker than yet the world



ever witnessed! Fear not, lovely girl! your virtue runs no risk from me. Not for Indies would I make that gentle bosom know the tortures of remorse."

Again he paced his chamber hastily. Then stopping, his eye fell upon the picture of his once-admired Madonna. He tore it with indignation from the wall: he threw it on the ground, and spurned it from him with his foot.

"The prostitute."

Unfortunate Matilda! her paramour forgot, that for his sake alone she had forfeited her claim to virtue; and his only reason for despising her was, that she had loved him much too well.

He threw himself into a chair, which stood near the table. He saw the card with Elvira's address. He took it up, and it brought to his recollection his promise respecting a confessor. He passed a few minutes in doubt; but Antonia's empire over him was already too much decided to permit his making a long resistance to the idea which struck him. He resolved to be the confessor himself. He could leave the abbey unobserved without difficulty: by wrapping up his head in his cowl he hoped to pass through the streets without being recognised: by taking these precautions and by recommending secrecy to Elvira's family, he doubted not to keep Madrid in ignorance that he had broken his vow never to see the outside of the abbey

walls. Matilda was the only person whose vigilance he dreaded: but by informing her at the refectory, that during the whole of that day business would confine him to his cell, he thought himself secure from her wakeful jealousy. Accordingly, at the hours when the Spaniards are generally taking their siesta, he ventured to quit the abbey by a private door, the key of which was in his possession. The cowl of his habit was thrown over his face: from the heat of the weather the streets were almost totally deserted: the monk met with few people, found the strada di San Iago, and arrived without accident at Donna Elvira's door. He rang, was admitted, and immediately ushered into an upper apartment.

It was here that he ran the greatest risk of a discovery. Had Leonella been at home, she would have recognised him directly. Her communicative disposition would never have permitted her to rest, till all Madrid was informed that Ambrosio had ventured out of the abbey, and visited her sister. Fortune here stood the monk's friend. On Leonella's return home, she found a letter instructing her, that a cousin was just dead, who had left what little he possessed between herself and Elvira. To secure this bequest she was obliged to set out for Cordova without losing a moment. Amidst all her foibles, her heart was truly warm and affectionate, and she was unwilling to quit

her sister in so dangerous a state. But Elvira insisted upon her taking the journey, conscious that, in her daughter's forlorn situation, no increase of fortune, however trifling, ought to be neglected. Accordingly Leonella left Madrid, sincerely grieved at her sister's illness, and giving some few sighs to the memory of the amiable but inconstant Don Christoval. She was fully persuaded, that at first she had made a terrible breach in his heart; but hearing nothing more of him, she supposed that he had quitted the pursuit, disgusted by the lowness of her origin, and knowing upon other terms than marriage he had nothing to hope from such a dragon of virtue as she professed herself; or else, that being naturally capricious and changeable, the remembrance of her charms had been effaced from the condé's heart by those of some newer beauty. Whatever was the cause of her losing him, she lamented it sorely. She strove in vain, as she assured everybody who was kind enough to listen to her, to tear his image from her too susceptible heart. She affected the airs of a love-sick virgin, and carried them all to the most ridiculous excess. She heaved lamentable sighs, walked with her arms folded, uttered long soliloquies, and her discourse generally turned upon some forsaken maid, who expired of a broken heart! Her fiery locks were always ornamented with a garland of willow. Every evening she was seen

straying upon the banks of a rivulet by moonlight; and she declared herself a violent admirer of murmuring streams and nightingales—

“Of lonely haunts, and twilight groves,
Places which pale passion loves!”

Such was the state of Leonella’s mind when obliged to quit Madrid. Elvira was out of patience at these follies, and endeavoured at persuading her to act like a reasonable woman. Her advice was thrown away: Leonella assured her at parting, that nothing could make her forget the perfidious Don Christoval. In this point she was fortunately mistaken. An honest youth of Cordova, journeyman to an apothecary, found that her fortune would be sufficient to set him up in a genteel shop of his own. In consequence of this reflection he avowed himself her admirer. Leonella was not inflexible; the ardour of his sighs melted her heart, and she soon consented to make him the happiest of mankind. She wrote to inform her sister of her marriage; but, for reasons which will be explained hereafter, Elvira never answered her letter.

Ambrosio was conducted into the anti-chamber to that where Elvira was reposing. The female domestic who had admitted him, left him alone, while she announced his arrival to her mistress. Antonia, who had been by her mother’s bed-side, immediately came to him.

"Pardon me, father," said she, advancing towards him; when recognizing his features, she stopped suddenly, and uttered a cry of joy. "Is it possible?" she continued, "do not my eyes deceive me? Has the worthy Ambrosio broken through his resolution, that he may soften the agonies of the best of women? What pleasure will this visit give my mother! Let me not delay for a moment the comfort which your piety and wisdom will afford her."

Thus saying, she opened the chamber-door, presented to her mother her distinguished visitor, and having placed an arm-chair by the side of the bed, withdrew into another apartment.

Elvira was highly gratified by this visit: her expectations had been raised high by general report, but she found them far exceeded. Ambrosio, endowed by nature with powers of pleasing, exerted them to the utmost, while conversing with Antonia's mother. With persuasive eloquence he calmed every fear, and dissipated every scruple. He bade her reflect on the infinite mercy of her judge, despoiled death of his darts and terrors, and taught her to view without shrinking the abyss of eternity, on whose brink she then stood. Elvira was absorbed in attention and delight; while she listened to his exhortations, confidence and comfort stole insensibly into her mind. She unbosomed to him without hesitation her cares and

apprehensions. The latter respecting a future life he had already quieted, and he now removed the former, which she felt for the concerns of this. She trembled for Antonia; she had none to whose care she could recommend her, save to the marquis de las Cisternas, and her sister Leonella. The protection of the one was very uncertain; and as to the other, though fond of her niece, Leonella was so thoughtless and vain, as to make her an improper person to have the sole direction of a girl so young and ignorant of the world. The friar no sooner learned the cause of her alarms, than he begged her to make herself easy upon that head. He doubted not being able to secure for Antonia a safe refuge in the house of one of his penitents, the marchioness of Villa-Franca: this was a lady of acknowledged virtue, remarkable for strict principle and extensive charity. Should accident deprive her of this resource, he engaged to procure Antonia a reception in some respectable convent, that is to say, in quality of boarder; for Elvira had declared herself no friend to a monastic life, and the monk was either candid or complaisant enough to allow that her disapprobation was not unfounded.

These proofs of the interest which he felt for her, completely won Elvira's heart. In thanking him, she exhausted every expression which gratitude could furnish, and protested, that now she should resign

herself with tranquility to the grave. Ambrosio rose to take leave; he promised to return the next day at the same hour, but requested that his visits might be kept secret.

"I am unwilling," said he, "that my breaking through a rule imposed by necessity, should be generally known. Had I not resolved never to quit my convent, except upon circumstances as urgent as that which has conducted me to your door, I should be frequently summoned upon insignificant occasions; that time would be engrossed by the curious, the unoccupied, and the fanciful, which I now pass at the bed-side of the sick, in comforting the expiring penitent, and clearing the passage to eternity from thorns."

Elvira commended equally his prudence and compassion, promising to conceal carefully the honour of his visits. The monk then gave her his benediction and retired from the chamber.

In the anti-room he found Antonia; he could not refuse himself the pleasure of passing a few moments in her society. He bade her take comfort, for that her mother seemed composed and tranquil, and he hoped that she might yet do well. He enquired who attended her, and engaged to send the physician of his convent to see her, one of the most skilful in Madrid. He then launched out in Elvira's commendation, praised her purity and fortitude of mind, and

declared that she had inspired him with the highest esteem and reverence. Antonia's innocent heart swelled with gratitude, joy danced in her eyes, where a tear still sparkled. The hopes which he gave her of her mother's recovery, the lively interest which he seemed to feel for her, and the flattering way in which she was mentioned by him, added to the report of his judgment and virtue, and to the impression made upon her by his eloquence, confirmed the favourable opinion with which his first appearance had inspired Antonia. She replied with diffidence, but without restraint: she feared not to relate to him all her little sorrows, all her little fears and anxieties; and she thanked him for his goodness with all the genuine warmth which favours kindle in a young and innocent heart. Such alone knows how to estimate benefits at their full value. They who are conscious of mankind's perfidy and selfishness, ever receive an obligation with apprehension and disgust; they suspect that some secret motive must lurk behind it; they express their thanks with restraint and caution, and fear to praise a kind action to its full extent, aware that on some future day a return may be required. Not so Antonia—she thought the world was composed only of those who resembled her; and that vice existed, was to her still a secret. The monk had been of service to her; he said that he wished her well; she was grateful for his kindness,

and thought that no terms were strong enough to be the vehicle of her thanks. With what delight did Ambrosio listen to the declaration of her artless gratitude! The natural grace of her manners, the unequalled sweetness of her voice, her modest vivacity, her unstudied elegance, her expressive countenance and intelligent eyes united to inspire him with pleasure and admiration; while the solidity and correctness of her remarks received additional beauty from the unaffected simplicity of the language in which they were conveyed.

Ambrosio was at length obliged to tear himself from this conversation, which possessed for him but too many charms. He repeated to Antonia his wishes, that his visits should not be made known; which desire she promised to observe. He then quitted the house, while his enchantress hastened to her mother, ignorant of the mischief which her beauty had caused. She was eager to know Elvira's opinion of the man whom she had praised in such enthusiastic terms, and was delighted to find it equally favourable, if not even more so than her own.

"Even before he spoke," said Elvira, "I was prejudiced in his favour; the fervour of his exhortations, dignity of his manner, and closeness of his reasoning, were very far from inducing me to alter my opinion. His fine and full-toned voice struck me particularly;

but surely, Antonia, I have heard it before. It seemed perfectly familiar to my ear: either I must have known the abbot in former times, or his voice bears a wonderful resemblance to that of some other to whom I have often listened. There were certain tones which touched my very heart, and made me feel sensations so singular, that I strive in vain to account for them."

"My dearest mother, it produced the same effect upon me; yet certainly neither of us ever heard his voice till we came to Madrid. I suspect that what we attribute to his voice, really proceeds from his pleasant manners, which forbid our considering him as a stranger. I know not why, but I feel more at my ease while conversing with him, than I usually do with people who are unknown to me. I feared not to repeat to him all my childish thoughts; and somehow I felt confident that he would hear my folly with indulgence. Oh! I was not deceived in him; he listened to me with such an air of kindness and attention; he answered me with such gentleness, such condescension; he did not call me an infant, and treat me with contempt, as our cross old confessor at the Castle used to do. I verily believe, that if I had lived in Murcia a thousand years, I never should have liked that fat old father Dominic!"

"I confess, that father Dominic had not the most

pleasing manners in the world; but he was honest, friendly, and well-meaning."

"Ah! my dear mother, those qualities are so common—

"God grant, my child, that experience may not teach you to think them rare and precious? I have found them but too much so. But tell me, Antonia, why is it impossible for me to have seen the abbot before?"

"Because, since the moment when he entered the abbey he has never been on the outside of its walls. He told me just now, that from his ignorance of the streets he had some difficulty to find the strada di San Iago, though so near the abbey."

"All this is possible, and still I may have seen him *before* he entered the abbey: in order to come out, it was necessary that he should first go in."

"Holy virgin! as you say, that is very true.—Oh! But might he not have been born in the abbey?"

Elvira smiled.

"Why, not very easily."

"Stay, stay! Now I recollect how it was. He was put into the abbey quite a child; the common people say, that he fell from heaven, and was sent as a present to the Capuchins by the Virgin."

"That was very kind of her. And so he fell from heaven, Antonia? He must have had a terrible tumble."

"Many do not credit this; and I fancy, my dear mother, that I must number you among the unbelievers. Indeed, as our landlady told my aunt, the general idea is, that his parents, being poor, and unable to maintain him, left him just born at the abbey door; the late superior, from pure charity, had him educated in the convent; and he proved to be a model of virtue, and piety, and learning, and I know not what else besides. In consequence, he was first received as a brother of the order, and not long ago was chosed abbot. However, whether this account or the other is the true one—at least all agree, that when the monks took him under their care, he could not speak; therefore you could not have heard his voice before he entered the monastery, because at that time he had no voice at all."

"Upon my word, Antonia, you argue very closely; your conclusions are infallible. I did not suspect you of being so able a logician."

"Ah! you are mocking me; but so much the better. It delights me to see you in spirits; besides, you seem tranquil and easy, and I hope that you will have no more convulsions. Oh! I was sure the abbot's visit would do you good."

"It has indeed done me good, my child. He has quieted my mind upon some points which agitated me, and I already feel the effects of his attention. My



eyes grow heavy, and I think I can sleep a little. Draw the curtains, my Antonia: but if I should not wake before midnight, do not sit up with me, I charge you."

Antonia promised to obey her; and, having received her blessing, drew the curtains of the bed. She then seated herself in silence at her embroidery frame, and beguiled the hours with building castles in the air. Her spirits were enlivened by the evident change for the better in Elvira, and her fancy presented her with visions bright and pleasing. In these, dreams Ambrosio made no despicable figure. She thought of him with joy and gratitude: but for every idea which fell to the friar's share, at least two were unconsciously bestowed upon Lorenzo. Thus passed the time, till the bell in the neighbouring steeple of the Capuchin cathedral announced the hour of midnight. Antonia remembered her mother's injunctions, and obeyed them, though with reluctance. She undrew the curtains with caution. Elvira was enjoying a profound and quiet slumber; her cheek glowed with health's returning colours: a smile declared that her dreams were pleasant, and as Antonia bent over her she fancied that she heard her name pronounced. She kissed her mother's forehead softly, and retired to her chamber; there she knelt before a statue of St. Rosolia, her patroness; she recommended herself to the protection of heaven,

and, as had been her custom from infancy, concluded her devotions by chaunting the following stanzas:

MIDNIGHT HYMN.

Now all is hush'd; the solemn chime,
No longer swells the nightly gale:
Thy awful presence, how sublime,
With spotless heart once more I hail.

'Tis now the moment still and dread,
When sorcerers use their baleful power;
When graves give up their buried dead
To profit by the sanctioned hour.

From guilt and guilty thoughts secure,
To duty and devotion true,
With bosom light and conscience pure,
Repose, thy gentle aid I woo.

Good angels! take my thanks, that still
The snares of vice I view with scorn;
Thanks, that to-night as free from ill
I sleep, as when I woke at morn.

Yet may not my unconscious breast
Harbour some guilt to me unknown?
Some wish impure, which unrepent
You blush to see, and I to own?

If such there be, in gentle dream
Instruct my feet to shun the snare;
Bid truth upon my errors beam,
And deign to make me still your care.

Chase from my peaceful bed away,
The witching spell, a foe to rest,
The nightly goblin, wanton say,
The ghost in pain, and fiend unblest.

The Monk.

Let not the tempter in mine ear
Pour lessons of unhallowed joy;
Let not the night-mare wandering near
My couch, the calm of sleep destroy.

Let not some horrid dream affright
With strange fantastic forms mine eyes;
But rather bid some vision bright
Display the bliss of yonder skies.

Shew me the crystal domes of heaven,
The worlds of light where angels lie;
Shew me the lot to mortals given,
Who guiltless live, who guiltless die.

Then shew me how a seat to gain
Amidst those blissful realms of air;
Teach me to shun each guilty stain,
And guide me to the good and fair.

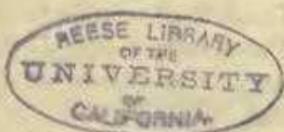
So every morn and night my voice
To heaven the grateful strain shall raise
If you as guardian powers rejoice,
Good angels! and exhalt your praise.

So will I strive, with zealous fire,
Each vice to shun, each fault correct:
Will love the lessons you inspire,
And prize the virtues you protect.

Then when at length, by high command,
My body seeks the grave's repose,
When death draws nigh with friendly hand,
My failing pilgrim eyes to close:

Pleased that my soul escapes the wreck,
Sightless will I my life resign,
And yield to God my spirit back,
As pure as when it first was mine.

Having finished her usual devotions, Antonia retired to bed. Sleep soon stole over her senses; and for several hours she enjoyed that calm repose which innocence alone can know, and for which many a monarch with pleasure would exchange his crown.



CHAPTER II.

—Ah! how dark
 These long-extended realms and rueful wastes:
 Where nought but silence reigns, and night, dark night,
 Dark as was chaos ere the infant sun
 Was rolled together, or had tried its beams
 Athwart the gloom profound! The sickly taper,
 By glimmering through thy low-browed misty vaults
 Furred round with mouldy damps and ropy slime,
 Lets fall a supernumerary horror,
 And only serves to make thy night more irksome!

BLAIR.



RETURNED undiscovered to the abbey, Ambrosio's mind was filled with the most pleasing images. He was wilfully blind to the danger of exposing himself to Antonia's charms: he only remembered the pleasure which her society had afforded him, and rejoiced in the prospect of that pleasure being repeated. He failed not to profit by Elvira's indisposition to obtain a sight of her daughter every day. At first he bounded his wishes to inspire Antonia with friendship: but no sooner was he con-

vinced that she felt that sentiment in its fullest extent, than his aim became more decided, and his attentions assumed a warmer colour. The innocent familiarity with which she treated him, encouraged his desires. Grown used to her modesty, it no longer commanded the same respect and awe: he still admired it, but it only made him more anxious to deprive her of that quality which formed her principal charm. Warmth of passion, and natural penetration, of which latter, unfortunately both for himself and Antonia, he possessed an ample share, supplied a knowledge of the arts of seduction. He easily distinguished the emotions which were favourable to his designs, and seized every means with avidity of infusing corruption into Antonia's bosom. This he found no easy matter. Extreme simplicity prevented her from perceiving the aim to which the monk's insinuations tended; but the excellent morals which she owed to Elvira's care, the solidity and correctness of her understanding, and a strong sense of what was right, implanted in her heart by nature, made her feel that his precepts must be faulty. By a few simple words she frequently overthrew the whole bulk of his sophistical arguments, and made him conscious how weak they were when opposed to virtue and truth. On such occasions he took refuge in his eloquence; he overpowered her with a torrent of philosophical paradoxes, to which, not understanding

them, it was impossible for her to reply; and thus, though he did not convince her that his reasoning was just, he at least prevented her from discovering it to be false. He perceived that her respect for his judgment augmented daily, and doubted not with time to bring her to the point desired.

He was not unconscious that his attempts were highly criminal. He saw clearly the baseness of seducing the innocent girl; but his passion was too violent to permit his abandoning his design. He resolved to pursue it, let the consequences be what they might. He depended upon finding Antonia in some unguarded moment; and seeing no other man admitted into her society, nor hearing any mentioned either by her or by Elvira, he imagined that her young heart was still unoccupied. While he waited for the opportunity of satisfying his unwarrantable lust, every day increased his coldness for Matilda. Not a little was this occasioned by the consciousness of his faults to her. To hide them from her, he was not sufficiently master of himself: yet he dreaded lest, in a transport of jealous rage, she should betray the secret on which his character and even his life depended. Matilda could not but remark his indifference: he was conscious that she remarked it, and, fearing her approaches, shunned her studiously. Yet, when he could not avoid her, her mildness might have convinced

him that he had nothing to dread from her resentment. She had resumed the character of the gentle interesting Rosario: she taxed him not with ingratitude; but her eyes filled with involuntary tears, and the soft melancholy of her countenance and voice uttered complaints far more touching than words could have conveyed. Ambrosio was not unmoved by her sorrow; but unable to remove its cause, he forbore to show that it affected him. As her conduct convinced him that he needed not fear her vengeance, he continued to neglect her, and avoided her company with care. Matilda saw that she in vain attempted to regain his affections; yet she stifled the impulse of resentment, and continued to treat her inconstant lover with her former fondness and affection.

By degrees Elvira's constitution recovered itself. She was no longer troubled with convulsions, and Antonia ceased to tremble for her mother. Ambrosio beheld this re-establishment with displeasure. He saw that Elvira's knowledge of the world would not be the dupe of his sanctified demeanour, and that she would easily perceive his views upon her daughter. He resolved therefore, before she quitted her chamber to try the extent of his influence over the innocent Antonia.

One evening, when he had found Elvira almost perfectly restored to health, he quitted her earlier than was his usual custom. Not finding Antonia in

the anti-chamber, he ventured to follow her to her own. It was only separated from her mother's by a closet, in which Flora, the waiting-woman, generally slept. Antonia sat upon a sofa with her back towards the door, and read attentively. She heard not his approach, till he had seated himself by her. She started, and welcomed him with a look of pleasure: then rising, she would have conducted him to the sitting-room; but Ambrosio, taking her hand, obliged her by gentle violence to resume her place. She complied without difficulty: she knew not that there was more impropriety in conversing with him in one room than another. She thought herself equally secure of his principles and her own; and having replaced herself upon the sofa, she began to prattle to him with her usual ease and vivacity.

He examined the book which she had been reading, and had now placed it upon the table. It was the Bible.

“How!” said the friar to himself, “Antonia reads the Bible, and is still so ignorant?”

But, upon further inspection, he found that Elvira had made exactly the same remark. That prudent mother, while she admired the beauties of the sacred writings, was convinced that, unrestricted, no reading more improper could be permitted to a young woman. Many of the narratives can only tend to excite ideas

the worst calculated for a female breast: everything is called plainly and roundly by its name; and the annals of a brothel would scarcely furnish a greater choice of indecent expressions. Yet this is the book which young women are recommended to study, which is put into the hands of children, able to comprehend little more than those passages of which they had better remain ignorant, and which but too frequently inculcates the first rudiments of vice, and gives the first alarm to the still sleeping passions. Of this was Elvira so fully convinced, that she would have preferred putting into her daughter's hands *Amadis de Gaul*, or *The Valiant Champion, Tirante the White*; and would sooner have authorised her studying the lewd exploits of *Don Galaor*, or the lascivious jokes of *Damsel Plazer di mi vida*. She had in consequence made two resolutions respecting the Bible. The first was, that Antonia should not read it till she was of an age to feel its beauties, and profit by its morality. The second that it should be copied out with her own hand, and all improper passages either altered or omitted. She had adhered to this determination, and such was the Bible which Antonia was reading; it had been lately delivered to her, and she perused it with avidity, with a delight that was inexpressible. Ambrosio perceived his mistake, and replaced the book upon the table.

Antonia spoke of her mother's health with all the enthusiastic joy of a youthful heart.

"I admire your filial affection," said the abbot; "it proves the excellence and sensibility of your character; it promises a treasure to him whom heaven has destined to possess your affections. The breast so capable of fondness for a parent, what will it feel for a lover? Nay, perhaps, what feels it for one even now? Tell me, my lovely daughter, have you known what it is to love? Answer me with sincerity: forget my habit, and consider me only as a friend."

"What it is to love?" said she, repeating his question. "Oh! yes, undoubtedly; I have loved many, many people."

"That is not what I mean. The love of which I speak can be felt only for one. Have you never seen the man whom you wished to be your husband?"

"Oh! no, indeed!"

This was an untruth, but she was unconscious of its falsehood: she knew not the nature of her sentiments for Lorenzo; and never having seen him since his first visit to Elvira, with every day his image grew less feebly impressed upon her bosom: besides she thought of an husband with all a virgin's terror, and negatived the friar's demand without a moment's hesitation.

"And do you not long to see that man, Antonia?

Do you feel no void in your heart, which you fain would have filled up? Do you heave no sighs for the absence of some one dear to you, but who that some one is you know not? Perceive you not that what formerly could please, has charms for you no longer? that a thousand new wishes, new ideas, new sensations, have sprung in your bosom, only to be felt, never to be described? Or, while you fill every other heart with passion, is it possible that your own remains insensible and cold? It cannot be! That melting eye, that blushing cheek, that enchanting voluptuous melancholy which at times overspreads your features —all these marks belie your words: you love, Antonia, and in vain would hide it from me."

"Father, you amaze me! What is this love of which you speak? I neither know its nature, nor, if I felt it, why I should conceal the sentiment."

"Have you seen no man, Antonia, whom, though never seen before, you seemed long to have sought? whose form, though a stranger's, was familiar to your eyes? the sound of whose voice soothed you, pleased you, penetrated to your very soul? in whose presence you rejoiced, for whose absence you lamented? with whom your heart seemed to expand, and in whose bosom, with confidence unbounded, you reposed the cares of your own? Have you not felt this, Antonia?"

"Certainly I have: the first time that I saw you, I felt it."

Ambrosio started. Scarcely dared he credit his hearing.

"Me, Antonia?" he cried, his eyes sparkling with delight and impatience, while he seized her hand, and pressed it rapturously to his lips. "Me, Antonia? You felt these sentiments for me?"

"Even with more strength than you have described. The very moment that I beheld you, I felt so pleased, so interested! I waited so eagerly to catch the sound of your voice; and, when I heard it, it seemed so sweet! it spoke to me a language till then so unknown! Methought it told me a thousand things which I wished to hear! It seemed as if I had long known you; as if I had a right to your friendship, your advice, and your protection. I wept when you departed, and longed for the time which should restore you to my sight."

"Antonia! my charming Antonia!" exclaimed the monk, and caught her to his bosom: "Can I believe my senses? Repeat it to me, my sweet girl! Tell me again that you love me, that you love me truly and tenderly!"

"Indeed, I do: let my mother be excepted, and the world holds no one more dear to me."

At this frank avowal Ambrosio no longer possessed

himself: wild with desire, he clasped the blushing trembler in his arms. He fastened his lips greedily upon hers, sucked in her pure delicious breath, violated with his bold hand the treasures of her bosom, and wound around him her soft and yielding limbs. Startled, alarmed, and confused at his action, surprise at first deprived her of the power of resistance. At length recovering herself, she strove to escape from his embrace.

“Father!—Ambrosio!” she cried, release me, for God’s sake!”

But the licentious monk heeded not her prayers: he persisted in his design, and proceeded to take still greater liberties. Antonia prayed, wept, and struggled: terrified to the extreme, though at what she knew not, she exerted all her strength to repulse the friar, and was on the point of shrieking for assistance when the chamber-door was suddenly thrown open. Ambrosio had just sufficient presence of mind to be sensible of his danger. Reluctantly he quitted his prey, and started hastily from the couch. Antonia uttered an exclamation of joy, flew towards the door, and found herself clasped in the arms of her mother.

Alarmed at some of the abbot’s speeches, which Antonia had innocently repeated, Elvira resolved to ascertain the truth of her suspicions. She had known

enough of mankind, not to be imposed upon by the monk's reputed virtue. She reflected on several circumstances, which, though trifling, on being put together seemed to authorize her fears. His frequent visits, which, as far as she could see, were confined to her family; his evident emotion, whenever she spoke of Antonia; his being in the full prime and heat of manhood; and above all, his pernicious philosophy communicated to her by Antonia, and which accorded but ill with his conversation in her presence; all these circumstances inspired her with doubts respecting the purity of Ambrosio's friendship. In consequence she resolved, when he should next be alone with Antonia, to endeavour at surprising him. Her plan had succeeded. 'Tis true, that when she entered the room, he had already abandoned his prey; but the disorder of her daughter's dress, and the shame and confusion stamped upon the friar's countenance, sufficed to prove that her suspicions were but too well founded. However, she was too prudent to make those suspicions known. She judged, that to unmask the impostor would be no easy matter, the public being so much prejudiced in his favour: and having but few friends, she thought it dangerous to make herself so powerful an enemy. She affected therefore not to remark his agitation, seated herself tranquilly upon the sofa, assigned some trifling reason for having quitted her room

unexpectedly, and conversed on various subjects with seeming confidence and ease.

Re-assured by her behaviour, the monk began to recover himself. He strove to answer Elvira without appearing embarrassed: but he was still too great a novice in dissimulation, and he felt that he must look confused and awkward. He soon broke off the conversation, and rose to depart. What was his vexation when, on taking leave, Elvira told him, in polite terms, that being now perfectly re-established, she thought it an injustice to deprive others of his company who might be more in need of it! She assured him of her eternal gratitude, for the benefit which during her illness she had derived from his society and exhortations: and she lamented that her domestic affairs, as well as the multitude of business which his situation must of necessity impose upon him, would in future deprive her of the pleasure of his visits. Though delivered in the mildest language, this hint was too plain to be mistaken. Still he was preparing to put in a remonstrance, when an expressive look from Elvira stopped him short. He dared not press her to receive him, for her manner convinced him that he was discovered: he submitted without reply, took an hasty leave, and retired to the abbey, his heart filled with rage and shame, with bitterness and disappointment.

Antonia's mind felt relieved by his departure; yet she could not help lamenting that she was never to see him more. Elvira also felt a secret sorrow: she had received too much pleasure from thinking him her friend, not to regret the necessity of changing her opinion; but her mind was too much accustomed to the fallacy of worldly friendships to permit her present disappointment to weigh upon it long. She now endeavoured to make her daughter aware of the risk which she had run: but she was obliged to treat the subject with caution, lest, in removing the bandage of ignorance, the veil of innocence should be rent away. She therefore contented herself with warning Antonia to be on her guard, and ordering her, should the abbot persist in his visits, never to receive them but in company. With these injunctions Antonia promised to comply.

Ambrosio hastened to his cell. He closed the door after him, and threw himself upon the bed in despair. The impulse of desire, the stings of disappointment, the shame of detection, and the fear of being publicly unmasked, rendered his bosom the scene of the most horrible confusion. He knew not what course to pursue. Debarred the presence of Antonia, he had no hopes of satisfying that passion which was now become a part of his existence. He recollects that his secret was in a woman's power: he trembled with

apprehension when he beheld the precipice before him, and with rage when he thought that, had it not been for Elvira, he should now have possessed the object of his desires. With the direst imprecations he vowed vengeance against her: he swore that, cost what it would, he still would possess Antonia. Starting from the bed, he paced the chamber with disordered steps, howled with impotent fury, dashed himself violently against the walls, and indulged all the transports of rage and madness.

He was still under the influence of this storm of passions, when he heard a gentle knock at the door of his cell. Conscious that his voice must have been heard, he dared not refuse admittance to the importuner. He strove to compose himself, and hide his agitation. Having in some degree succeeded, he drew back the bolt: the door opened, and Matilda appeared.

At this precise moment there was no one with whose presence he could better have dispensed. He had not sufficient command over himself to conceal his vexation. He started back and frowned.

“I am busy,” said he in a stern and hasty tone; “leave me.”

Matilda heeded him not: she again fastened the door, and then advanced towards him with an air gentle and supplicating.

“Forgive me, Ambrosio,” said she; “for your own-



sake I must not obey you. Fear no complaints from me; I come not to reproach you with ingratitude. I pardon you from my heart; and since your love can no longer be mine, I request the next best gift, your confidence and friendship. We cannot force our inclinations: the little beauty you once saw in me has perished with its novelty; and if it can no longer excite desire, mine is the fault, not yours. But why persist in shunning me? why such anxiety to fly my presence? You have sorrows, but will not permit me to share them; you have wishes, but forbid my aiding your pursuits. 'Tis of this which I complain, not of your indifference to my person. I have given up the claims of the mistress, but nothing shall prevail on me to give up those of the friend."

"Generous Matilda!" he replied, taking her hand, "how far do you rise superior to the foibles of your sex! Yes, I accept your offer. I have need of an adviser, and a confidant: in you I find every needful quality united. But to aid my pursuits——Ah! Matilda, it lies not in your power!"

"It lies in no one's power but mine. Ambrosio, your secret is none to me: your every step, your every action has been observed by my attentive eye. You love."

"Matilda!"

"Why conceal it from me? Fear not the little

jealousy which taints the generality of women: my soul despairs so despicable a passion. You love, Ambrosio; Antonia Dalsa is the object of your flame. I know every circumstance respecting your passion. Every conversation has been repeated to me. I have been informed of your attempt to enjoy Antonia's person, your disappointment, and dismission from Elvira's house. You now despair of possessing your mistress; but I come to revive your hopes, and point out the road to success."

"To success? Oh! impossible."

"To those who dare, nothing is impossible. Rely upon me, and you may yet be happy. The time is come, Ambrosio, when regard for your comfort and tranquility compels me to reveal a part of my history; with which you are still unacquainted. Listen, and do not interrupt me. Should my confession disgust you, remember that in making it my sole aim is to satisfy your wishes, and restore that peace to your heart which at present has abandoned it. I formerly mentioned, that my guardian was a man of uncommon knowledge. He took pains to instil that knowledge into my infant mind. Among the various sciences which curiosity had induced him to explore, he neglected not that which by most is esteemed impious, and by many chimerical: I speak of those arts which relate to the world of spirits. His deep researches

into causes and effects, his unwearied application to the study of natural philosophy, his profound and unlimited knowledge of the properties and virtues of every gem which enriches the deep, of every herb which the earth produces, at length procured him the distinction which he had sought so long, so earnestly. His curiosity was fully slaked, his ambition amply gratified. He gave laws to the elements: he could reverse the order of nature: his eye read the mandates of futurity, and the infernal spirits were submissive to his commands. Why shrink you from me? I understand that enquiring look. Your suspicions are right, though your terrors are unfounded. My guardian concealed not from me his most precious acquisition. Yet, had I never seen *you* I should never have exerted my power. Like you, I shuddered at the thoughts of magic. Like you, I had formed a terrible idea of the consequences of raising a demon. To preserve that life which your love had taught me to prize, I had recourse to means which I trembled at employing. You remember that night which I passed in St. Clare's sepulchre? Then was it that, surrounded by mouldering bodies, I dared to perform those mystic rites, which summoned to my aid a fallen angel. Judge what must have been my joy at discovering that my terrors were imaginary. I saw the demon obedient to my orders: I saw him trembling at my frown; and found that,

instead of selling my soul to a master, my courage had purchased for myself a slave."

"Rash Matilda! What have you done? You have doomed yourself to endless perdition; you have bartered for momentary power eternal happiness. If on witchcraft depends the fruition of my desires, I renounce you aid most absolutely. The consequences are too horrible. I dote upon Antonia, but am not so blinded by lust, as to sacrifice for her enjoyment my existence both in this world and in the next."

"Ridiculous prejudices! Oh! blush, Ambrosio, blush at being subjected to their dominion. Where is the risk of accepting my offers? What should induce my persuading you to this step, except the wish of restoring you to happiness and quiet? If there is danger, it must fall upon me. It is I who invoke the ministry of the spirits: mine therefore will be the crime, and yours the profit; but danger there is none. The enemy of mankind is my slave, not my sovereign. Is there no difference between giving and receiving laws, between serving and commanding? Awake from your idle dreams, Ambrosio? throw from you these terrors so ill suited to a soul like yours; leave them for common men, and dare to be happy! Accompany me this night to St. Clare's sepulchre; there witness my incantations, and Antonia is your own."

"To obtain her by such means, I neither can nor will. Cease then to persuade me, for I dare not employ hell's agency."

"You *dare* not? How have you deceived me! That mind which I esteemed so great and valiant, proves to be feeble, puerile, and grovelling, a slave to vulgar errors, and weaker than a woman's."

"What? Though conscious of the danger, wilfully shall I expose myself to the seducer's arts? Shall I renounce for ever my title to salvation. Shall my eyes seek a sight which I know will blast them? No, no, Matilda, I will not ally myself with God's enemy."

"Are you then God's friend at present? Have you not broken your engagements with Him, renounced His services, and abandoned yourself to the impulse of your passions? Are you not planning the destruction of innocence, the ruin of a creature whom He formed in the mould of angels? If not of demons, whose aid would you invoke to forward this laudable design? Will the seraphims protect it, conduct Antonia to your arms, and sanction with their ministry your illicit pleasures? Absurd! But I am not deceived, Ambrosio! It is not virtue which makes you reject my offer; you *would* accept it but you *dare* not. 'Tis not the crime which holds your hand, but the punishment; 'tis not respect for God which restrains you, but the terror of

His vengeance! Fain would you offend Him in secret, but you tremble to profess yourself His foe. Now shame on the coward soul, which wants the courage either to be a firm friend, or an open enemy!"

"To look upon guilt with horror, Matilda, is in itself a merit: in this respect I glory to confess myself a coward. Though my passions have made me deviate from her laws, I still feel in my heart an innate love of virtue. But it ill becomes you to tax me with perjury; you who first seduced me to violate my vows; you who first roused my sleeping vices, made me feel the weight of religion's chains, and bade me be convinced that guilt had pleasures. Yet though my principles have yielded to the force of temperament, I still have sufficient grace to shudder at sorcery, and avoid a crime so monstrous, so unpardonable!"

"Unpardonable, say you? Where then is your constant boast of the Almighty's infinite mercy? Has He of late set bounds to it? Receives He no longer a sinner with joy? You injure Him, Ambrosio; you will always have time to repent, and He have goodness to forgive. Afford Him a glorious opportunity to exert that goodness: the greater your crime, the greater His merit in pardoning. Away then with these childish scruples; be persuaded to your good, and follow me to the sepulchre."

"Oh! cease, Matilda! That scoffing tone, that

bold and impious language is horrible in every mouth, but most so in a woman's. Let us drop a conversation which excites no other sentiments than horror and disgust. I will not follow you to the sepulchre, or accept the services of your infernal agents. Antonia shall be mine, but by human means."

"Then yours she will never be! You are banished her presence; her mother has opened her eyes to your designs, and she is now upon her guard against them. Nay, more, she loves another; a youth of distinguished merit possesses her heart; and unless you interfere, a few days will make her his bride. This intelligence was brought me by my invisible servants, to whom I had recourse on first perceiving your indifference. They watched your every action, related to me all that passed at Elvira's, and inspired me with the idea of favouring your designs. Their reports have been my only comfort. Though you have shunned my presence, all your proceedings were known to me; nay, I was constantly with you in some degree, thanks to this most precious gift!"

With these words she drew from beneath her habit a mirror of polished steel, the borders of which were marked with various strange and unknown characters.

"Amidst all my sorrows, amidst all my regrets for your coldness, I was sustained from despair by the virtues of this talisman. On pronouncing certain words,

the person appears in it on whom the observer's thoughts are bent: thus, though *I* was exiled from *your* sight, you, Ambrosio, were ever present to mine."

The friar's curiosity was strongly excited.

"What you relate is incredible! Matilda, are you not amusing yourself with my credulity?"

"Be your own eyes the judge."

She put the mirror into his hand. Curiosity induced him to take it, and love, to wish that Antonia might appear. Matilda pronounced the magic words. Immediately a thick smoke rose from the characters traced upon the borders, and spread itself over the surface. It dispersed again gradually; a confused mixture of colours and images presented themselves to the friar's eyes, which at length arranging themselves in their proper places, he beheld in miniature Antonia's lovely form.¹

The scene was a small closet belonging to her apartment. She was undressing to bathe herself. The long tresses of her hair was already bound up. The amorous monk had full opportunity to observe the voluptuous contours and admirable symmetry of her person. She threw off her last garment, and, advancing to the bath prepared for her, put her foot into the water. It struck cold, and she drew it back again. Though unconscious of being observed, an in-bred sense of modesty induced her to veil her charms; and

she stood hesitating upon the brink, in the attitude of the *Venus de Medicis*. At this moment a tame linnet flew towards her, nestled its head between her breasts, and nibbled them in wanton play. The smiling Antonia strove in vain to shake off the bird, and at length raised her hands to drive it from its delightful harbour. Ambrosio could bear no more. His desires were worked up to frenzy.

“I yield!” he cried, dashing the mirror upon the ground: “Matilda, I follow you! Do with me what you will!”

She waited not to hear his consent repeated. It was already midnight. She flew to her cell, and soon returned with her little basket and the key of the cemetery, which had remained in her possession since her first visit to the vaults. She gave the monk no time for reflection.

“Come!” she said, and took his hand; follow me, and witness the effects of your resolve.”

This said, she drew him hastily along. They passed into the burying-ground unobserved, opened the door of the sepulchre, and found themselves at the head of the subterraneous staircase. As yet the beams of the full moon had guided their steps, but that resource now failed them. Matilda had neglected to provide herself with a lamp. Still holding Ambrosio’s hand she descended the marble steps; but the profound

obscurity with which they were overspread, obliged them to walk slow and cautiously.

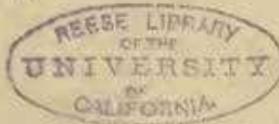
"You tremble!" said Matilda to her companion; "fear not, the destined spot is near."

They reached the foot of the staircase, and continued to proceed, feeling their way along the walls. On turning a corner, suddenly they described faint gleams of light, which seemed burning at a distance. Thither they bent their steps. The rays proceeded from a small sepulchral lamp which flamed unceasingly before the statue of St. Clare. It tinged with dim and cheerless beams the massive columns which supported the roof, but was too feeble to dissipate the thick gloom in which the vaults above were buried.

Matilda took the lamp.

"Wait for me!" said she to the friar; "in a few moments I am here again."

With these words she hastened into one of the passages which branched in various directions from this spot, and formed a sort of labyrinth. Ambrosio was now left alone. Darkness the most profound surrounded him, and encouraged the doubts which began to revive in his bosom. He had been hurried away by the delirium of the moment. The shame of betraying his terrors, while in Matilda's presence, had induced him to repress them; but, now that he was abandoned to himself, they resumed their former



ascendancy. He trembled at the scene which he was soon to witness. He knew not how far the delusions of magic might operate upon his mind: they possibly might force him to some deed, whose commission would make the breach between himself and heaven irreparable. In this fearful dilemma, he would have implored God's assistance, but was conscious that he had forfeited all claim to such protection. Gladly would he have returned to the abbey; but as he had passed through innumerable caverns and winding passages, the attempt of regaining the stairs was hopeless. His fate was determined; no possibility of escape presented itself. He therefore combated his apprehensions, and called every argument to his succour, which might enable him to support the trying scene with fortitude. He reflected, that Antonia would be the reward of his daring. He inflamed his imagination by enumerating her charms. He persuaded himself, that (as Matilda had observed) he always should have time sufficient for repentance; and that, as he employed *her* assistance, not that of demons, the crime of sorcery could not be laid to his charge. He had read much respecting witchcraft; he understood that, unless a formal act was signed renouncing his claim to salvation, Satan would have no power over him. He was fully determined not to execute any such act, whatever threats might be used or advantages held out to him.

Such were his meditations while waiting for Matilda. They were interrupted by a low murmur, which seemed at no great distance from him. He was startled—he listened. Some minutes passed in silence, after which the murmur was repeated. It appeared to be the groaning of one in pain. In any other situation, this circumstance would only have excited his attention and curiosity. In the present, his predominant sensation was that of terror. His imagination totally engrossed by the ideas of sorcery and spirits, he fancied that some unquiet ghost was wandering near him; or else that Matilda had fallen a victim to her presumption, and was perishing under the cruel fangs of the demons. The noise seemed not to approach, but continued to be heard at intervals. Sometimes it became more audible—doubtless, as the sufferings of the person who uttered the groans became more acute and insupportable. Ambrosio now and then thought that he could distinguish accents, and once in particular he was almost convinced that he heard a faint voice exclaim,

“God! Oh! God! No hope! No succour.”

Yet deeper groans followed these words: they died away gradually, and universal silence again prevailed.

“What can this mean?” thought the bewildered monk.

At that moment an idea which flashed into his

mind, almost petrified him with horror. He started, and shuddered at himself.

"Should it be possible!" he groaned involuntarily; "should it be possible. Oh! what a monster am I!"

He wished to resolve his doubts, and to repair his fault, if it were not too late already. But these generous and compassionate sentiments were soon put to flight by the return of Matilda. He forgot the groaning sufferer, and remembered nothing but the danger and embarrassment of his own situation. The light of the returning lamp gilded the walls, and in a few moments after Matilda stood beside him. She had quitted her religious habit: she was now clothed in a long sable robe, on which was traced in gold embroidery a variety of unknown characters: it was fastened by a girdle of precious stones, in which was fixed a poniard. Her neck and arms were uncovered; in her hand she bore a golden wand; her hair was loose, and flowed wildly upon her shoulders; her eyes sparkled with terrific expression; and her whole demeanour was calculated to inspire the beholder with awe and admiration.

"Follow me!" she said to the monk in a low and solemn voice; "all is ready!"

His limbs trembled while he obeyed her. She led him through various narrow passages; and on every

side as they passed along, the beams of the lamp displayed none but the most revolting objects; skulls, bones, graves, and images whose eyes seemed to glare on them with horror and surprise. At length they reached a spacious cavern, whose lofty roof the eye sought in vain to discover. A profound obscurity hovered through the void; damp vapours struck cold to the friar's heart, and he listened sadly to the blast while it howled along the lonely vaults. Here Matilda stopped. She turned to Ambrosio. His cheeks and lips were pale with apprehension. By a glance of mingled scorn and anger she reproved his pusillanimity, but she spoke not. She placed the lamp upon the ground near the basket. She motioned that Ambrosio should be silent, and began the mysterious rites. She drew a circle round him, another round herself; and then, taking a small phial from her basket, poured a few drops upon the ground before her. She bent over the place, muttered some indistinct sentences, and immediately a pale sulphurous flame arose from the ground. It increased by degrees, and at length spread its waves over the whole surface, the circles alone excepted in which stood Matilda and the monk. It then ascended the huge columns of unhewn stone, glided along the roof, and formed the cavern into an immense chamber totally covered with blue trembling fire. It emitted no heat: on the contrary, the extreme chillness of the

place seemed to augment with every moment. Matilda continued her incantations; at intervals she took various articles from the basket, the nature and name of most of which were unknown to the friar: but among the few which he distinguished, he particularly observed three human fingers, and an agnus dei which she broke in pieces. She threw them all into the flames which burned before her, and they were instantly consumed.

The monk beheld her with anxious curiosity. Suddenly she uttered a loud and piercing shriek. She appeared to be seized with an access of delirium; she tore her hair, beat her bosom, used the most frantic gestures, and, drawing the poniard from her girdle, plunged it into her left arm. The blood gushed out plentifully; and, as she stood on the brink of the circle, she took care that it should fall on the outside. The flames retired from the spot on which the blood was pouring. A volume of dark clouds rose slowly from the ensanguined earth, and ascended gradually till it reached the vault of the cavern. At the same time a clap of thunder was heard, the echo pealed fearfully along the subterraneous passages, and the ground shook beneath the feet of the enchantress.

It was now that Ambrosio repented of his rashness. The solemn singularity of the charm had prepared him for something strange and horrible. He waited with fear for the spirit's appearance, whose coming

was announced by thunder and earthquakes. He looked wildly around him, expecting that some dreadful apparition would meet his eyes, the sight of which would drive him mad. A cold shivering seized his body, and he sunk upon one knee, unable to support himself.

“He comes!” exclaimed Matilda in a joyful accent.

Ambrosio started, and expected the demon with terror. What was his surprise when, the thunder ceasing to roll, a full strain of melodious music sounded in the air! At the same time the cloud disappeared, and he beheld a figure more beautiful than fancy’s pencil ever drew. It was a youth seemingly scarce eighteen, the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled. He was perfectly naked: a bright star sparkled upon his forehead, two crimson wings extended themselves from his shoulders, and his silken locks were confined by a band of many-coloured fires, which played round his head, formed themselves into a variety of figures, and shone with a brilliancy far surpassing that of precious stones. Circlets of diamonds were fastened round his arms and ankles, and in his right hand he bore a silver branch imitating myrtle. His form shone with dazzling glory: he was surrounded by clouds of rose-coloured light, and at the moment that he appeared, a refreshing air breathed perfumes

through the cavern. Enchanted at a vision so contrary to his expectations, Ambrosio gazed upon the spirit with delight and wonder: yet, however beautiful the figure, he could not but remark a wildness in the demon's eyes, and a mysterious melancholy impressed upon his features, betraying the fallen angel, and inspiring the spectators with secret awe.

The music ceased. Matilda addressed herself to the spirit: she spoke in a language unintelligible to the monk, and was answered in the same. She seemed to insist upon something which the demon was unwilling to grant. He frequently darted upon Ambrosio angry glances, and at such times the friar's heart sank within him. Matilda appeared to grow incensed; she spoke in a loud and commanding tone, and her gesture declared that she was threatening him with her vengeance. Her menaces had the desired effect. The spirit sank upon his knee, and with a submissive air presented to her the branch of myrtle. No sooner had she received it, than the music was again heard; a thick cloud spread itself over the apparition; the blue flames disappeared, and total obscurity reigned through the cave. The abbot moved not from his place: his faculties were all bound up in pleasure, anxiety, and surprise. At length the darkness dispersing, he perceived Matilda standing near him in her religious habit, with the myrtle in her hand. No traces remained

of the incantation, and the vaults were only illuminated by the faint rays of the sepulchral lamp.

"I have succeeded," said Matilda, "though with more difficulty than I expected. Lucifer, whom I summoned to my assistance, was at first unwilling to obey my commands; to enforce his compliance, I was constrained to have recourse to my strongest charms. They have produced the desired effect, but I have engaged never more to invoke his agency in your favour. Beware then how you employ an opportunity which never will return. My magic arts will now be of no use to you: in future you can only hope for supernatural aid, by invoking the demons yourself, and accepting the conditions of their service. This you will never do. You want strength of mind to force them to obedience; and unless you pay their established price, they will not be your voluntary servants. In this one instance they consent to obey you; I offer you the means of enjoying your mistress, and be careful not to lose the opportunity. Receive this constellated myrtle: while you bear this in your hand, every door will fly open to you. It will procure you access to-morrow night to Antonia's chamber: then breathe upon it thrice, pronounce her name, and place it upon her pillow. A death-like slumber will immediately seize upon her, and deprive her of the power of resisting your attempts. Sleep will hold her till break

of morning. In this state you may satisfy your desires without danger of being discovered; since, when daylight shall dispel the effects of the enchantment, Antonia will perceive her dishonour, but be ignorant of the ravisher. Be happy then, my Ambrosio, and let this service convince you that my friendship is disinterested and pure. The night must be near expiring: let us return to the abbey, lest our absence should create surprise."

The abbot received the talisman with silent gratitude. His ideas were too much bewildered by the adventures of the night, to permit his expressing his thanks audibly, or indeed as yet to feel the whole value of her present. Matilda took up her lamp and basket, and guided her companion from the mysterious cavern. She restored the lamp to its former place, and continued her route in darkness till she reached the foot of the staircase. The first beams of the rising sun darting down it facilitated the ascent. Matilda and the abbot hastened out of the sepulchre, closed the door after them, and soon regained the abbey's western cloister. No one met them, and they retired unobserved to their respective cells.

The confusion of Ambrosio's mind now began to appease. He rejoiced in the fortunate issue of his adventure, and, reflecting upon the virtues of the myrtle, looked upon Antonia as already in his power.

Imagination retraced to him those secret charms betrayed to him by the enchanted mirror, and he waited with impatience for the approach of midnight.

CHAPTER III.

The crickets sing, and man's o'erlaboured sense
Repairs itself by rest: our Tarquin thus
Did softly press the rushes, ere he wakened
The chastity he wounded—Cytherea,
How bravely thou becom'st thy bed! Fresh lily!
And whiter than the sheets!

CYMBELINE.



LL the researches of the marquis de las Cisternas proved vain. Agnes was lost to him for ever. Despair produced so violent an effect upon his constitution, that the consequence was a long and severe illness. This prevented him from visiting Elvira, as he had intended; and she being ignorant of the cause of his neglect, it gave her no trifling uneasiness. His sister's death had prevented Lorenzo from communicating to his uncle his designs respecting Antonia. The injunctions of her mother forbade him presenting himself to her without the duke's consent; and as she heard no more of him or his proposals, Elvira, conjectured that he had either met

with a better match, or had been commanded to give up all thoughts of her daughter. Every day made her more uneasy respecting Antonia's fate; yet, while she retained the abbot's protection, she bore with fortitude the disappointment of her hopes with regard to Lorenzo and the marquis. That recourse now failed her. She was convinced that Ambrosio had meditated her daughter's ruin; and when she reflected that her death would leave Antonia friendless and unprotected in a world so base, so perfidious and depraved, her heart swelled with the bitterness of apprehension. At such times she would sit for hours gazing upon the lovely girl, and seeming to listen to her innocent prattle, while in reality her thoughts dwelt upon the sorrows into which a moment would suffice to plunge her. Then she would clasp her in her arms suddenly, lean her head upon her daughter's bosom, and bedew it with her tears.

An event was in preparation, which, had she known it, would have relieved her from her inquietude. Lorenzo now waited only for a favourable opportunity to inform the duke of his intended marriage: however, a circumstance which occurred at this period obliged him to delay his explanation for a few days longer.

Don Raymond's malady seemed to gain ground. Lorenzo was constantly at his bed-side, and treated him with a tenderness truly fraternal. Both the cause

and effects of the disorder were highly afflicting to the brother of Agnes; yet Theodore's grief was scarcely less sincere. That amiable boy quitted not his master for a moment, and put every means in practice to console and alleviate his sufferings. The marquis had conceived so rooted an affection for his deceased mistress, that it was evident to all that he never could survive her loss. Nothing could have prevented him from sinking under his grief, but the persuasion of her being still alive, and in need of his assistance. Though convinced of its falsehood, his attendants encouraged him in a belief which formed his only comfort. He was assured daily that fresh perquisitions were making respecting the fate of Agnes; stories were invented recounting the various attempts made to get admittance into the convent; and circumstances were related, which, though they did not promise her absolute recovery, at least were sufficient to keep his hopes alive. The marquis constantly fell into the most terrible access of passion, when informed of the failure of their supposed attempts. Still he would not credit that the succeeding ones would have the same fate, but flattered himself that the next would prove more fortunate.

Theodore was the only one who exerted himself to realise his master's chimeras. He was eternally busied in planning schemes for entering the convent,

or at least obtaining from the nuns some intelligence of Agnes. To execute these schemes was the only inducement which could prevail on him to quit Don Raymond. He became a very Proteus, changing his shape every day; but all his metamorphoses were to very little purpose. He regularly returned to the palace de las Cisternas without any intelligence to confirm his master's hopes. One day he took it into his head to disguise himself as a beggar; he put a patch over his left eye, took his guitar in hand, and posted himself at the gate of the convent.

"If Agnes is really confined in the convent," thought he, "and hears my voice, she will recollect it, and possibly may find means to let me know that she is here."

With this idea he mingled with a crowd of beggars who assembled daily at the gate of St. Clare to receive soup, which the nuns were accustomed to distribute at twelve o'clock. All were provided with jugs or bowls to carry it away; but as Theodore had no utensil of this kind, he begged leave to eat his portion at the convent door. This was granted without difficulty. His sweet voice, and, in spite of his patched eye, his engaging countenance, won the heart of the good old porteress, who, aided by a lay-sister, was busy serving to each his mess. Theodore was bid to stay till the others should depart, and promised that

his request should then be granted. The youth desired no better, since it was not to eat soup that he presented himself at the convent. He thanked the porteress for her permission, retired from the door, and, seating himself on a large stone, amused himself in tuning his guitar while the beggars were served.

As soon as the crowd was gone, Theodore was beckoned to the gate, and desired to come in. He obeyed with infinite readiness, but affected great respect at passing the hallowed threshold, and to be much daunted by the presence of the reverend ladies. His feigned timidity flattered the vanity of the nuns, who endeavoured to re-assure him. The porteress took him into her own little parlour: in the meanwhile, the lay-sister went to the kitchen, and soon returned with a double portion of soup of better quality than what was given to the beggars. His hostess added some fruits and confections from her own private store, and both encouraged the youth to dine heartily. To all these attentions he replied with much seeming gratitude, and abundance of blessings upon his benefactresses. While he ate, the nuns admired the delicacy of his features, the beauty of his hair, and the sweetness and grace which accompanied all his actions. They lamented to each other in whispers, that so charming a youth should be exposed to the seductions of the world, and agreed that he would be a worthy pillar of

the catholic church. They concluded their conference by resolving, that heaven would be rendered a real service, if they entreated the prioress to intercede with Ambrosio for the beggar's admission into the order of Capuchins.

This being determined, the porteress, who was a person of great influence in the convent, posted away in all haste to the domina's cell. Here she made so flaming a narrative of Theodore's merits, that the old lady grew curious to see him. Accordingly, the porteress was commissioned to convey him to the parlour-grate. In the interim, the supposed beggar was sifting the lay-sister with respect to the fate of Agnes: her evidence only corroborated the domina's assertions. She said, that Agnes had been taken ill on returning from confession, had never quitted her bed from that moment, and that she had herself been present at the funeral. She even attested having seen her dead body, and assisted with her own hands in adjusting it upon the bier. This account discouraged Theodore; yet, as he had pushed the adventure so far, he resolved to witness its conclusion.

The porteress now returned, and ordered him to follow her. He obeyed, and was conducted into the parlour, where the lady prioress was already posted at the grate. The nuns surrounded her, who all flocked with eagerness to a scene which promised some



diversion. Theodore saluted them with profound respect, and his presence had the power to smooth for a moment even the stern brow of the superior. She asked several questions respecting his parents, his religion, and what had reduced him to a state of beggary. To these demands his answers were perfectly satisfactory and perfectly false. He was then asked his opinion of a monastic life. He replied in terms of high estimation and respect for it. Upon this the prioress told him, that his obtaining an entrance into a religious order was not impossible; that her recommendation would not permit his poverty to be an obstacle; and that, if she found him deserving it, he might depend in future upon her protection. Theodore assured her that to merit her favour would be his highest ambition; and having ordered him to return next day, when she would talk with him further, the domina quitted the parlour.

The nuns, whom respect for the superior had till then kept silent, now crowded all together to the grate, and assailed the youth with a multitude of questions. He had already examined each with attention. Alas! Agnes was not amongst them. The nuns heaped question upon question so thickly, that it was scarcely possible for him to reply. One asked where he was born, since his accent declared him to be a foreigner: another wanted to know why

he wore a patch upon his left eye: sister Helena enquired whether he had not a sister like him, because she should like such a companion: and sister Rachael was fully persuaded that the brother would be the pleasanter companion of the two. Theodore amused himself with relating to the credulous nuns, for truths, all the strange stories which his imagination could invent. He related to them his supposed adventures, and penetrated every auditor with astonishment, while he talked of giants, savages, shipwrecks and islands inhabited.

"By anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders,"

with many other circumstances to the full as remarkable. He said that he was born in Terra Incognita, was educated at an Hottentot university, and had passed two years among the Americans of Silesia.

"For what regards the loss of my eye," said he, it was a just punishment upon me for disrespect to the Virgin, when I made my second pilgrimage to Loretto. I stood near the altar in the miraculous chapel: the monks were proceeding to array the statue in her best apparel. The pilgrims were ordered to close their eyes during this ceremony; but though by nature extremely religious, curiosity was too powerful. At the moment.....I shall penetrate you with horror,

reverend ladies, when I reveal my crime!.....At the moment that the monks were changing her shift, I ventured to open my left eye, and gave a little peep towards the statue. That look was my last! The glory which surrounded the Virgin was too great to be supported. I hastily shut my sacriligious eye, and never have been able to unclose it since!"

At the relation of this miracle the nuns all crossed themselves, and promised to intercede with the blessed Virgin for the recovery of his sight. They expressed their wonder at the extent of his travels, and at the strange adventures which he had met with at so early an age. They now remarked his guitar, and enquired whether he was an adept in music. He replied with modesty, that it was not for him to decide upon his talents, but requested permission to appeal to them as judges. This was granted without difficulty.

"But at least," said the old porteress, "take care not to sing anything profane."

"You may depend upon my discretion," replied Theodore; "you shall hear how dangerous it is for young women to abandon themselves to their passions, illustrated by the adventure of a damsel, who fell suddenly in love with an unknown knight."

"But is the adventure true?" enquired the porteress.

"Every word of it. It happened in Denmark;

and the heroine was thought so beautiful, that she was known by no other name than that of 'the lovely maid.'"

"In Denmark, say you?" mumbled an old nun: "Are not the people all blacks in Denmark?"

"By no means, reverend lady; they are of a delicate pea-green, with flame-coloured hair and whiskers."

"Mother of God! Pea-green?" exclaimed sister Helena: "Oh! 'tis impossible!"

"Impossible!" said the porteress, with a look of contempt and exultation: "Not at all: when I was a young woman, I remember seeing several of them myself."

Theodore now put his instrument in proper order. He had read the story of a king of England, whose prison was discovered by a minstrel: and he hoped that the same scheme would enable him to discover Agnes, should she be in the convent. He chose a ballad, which she had taught him herself in the castle of Lindenberg: she might possibly catch the sound, and he hoped to hear her replying to some of the stanzas. His guitar was now in tune, and he prepared to strike it.

"But, before I begin," said he, "it is necessary to inform you, ladies, that this same Denmark is terribly infested by sorcerers, witches, and evil spirits. Every element possesses its appropriate demons. The woods

are haunted by a malignant power, called 'The Erl, or Oak King:' he it is who blights the trees, spoils the harvest, and commands the imps and goblins. He appears in the form of an old man of majestic figure, with a golden crown and long white beard. His principal amusement is to entice young children from their parents; and as soon as he gets them into his cave, he tears them into a thousand pieces. The rivers are governed by another fiend, called 'The Water King.' His province is to agitate the deep, occasion shipwrecks, and drag the drowning sailors beneath the waves. He wears the appearance of a warrior, and employs himself in luring young virgins into his snare: what he does with them, when he catches them in the water, reverend ladies, I leave for you to imagine. 'The Fire King' seems to be a man all formed of flames: he raises the meteors and wandering lights, which beguile travellers into ponds and marshes, and he directs the lightning where it may do most mischief. The last of these elementary demons is called 'The Cloud King:' his figure is that of a beautiful youth, and he is distinguished by two large sable wings: though his outside is so enchanting, he is not a bit better disposed than the others. He is continually employed in raising storms, tearing up forests by the roots, and blowing castles and convents about the ears of the inhabitants. The first has a

daughter, who is queen of the elves and fairies: the second has a mother, who is a powerful enchantress. Neither of these ladies are worth more than the gentlemen. I do not remember to have heard any family assigned to the two other demons, but at present I have no business with any of them except the fiend of the waters. He is the hero of my ballad; but I thought it necessary, before I began, to give you some account of his proceedings."

Theodore then played a short symphony; after which, stretching his voice to its utmost extent, to facilitate its reaching the ear of Agnes, he sung the following stanzas:

THE WATER-KING.

A DANISH BALLAD.

With gentle murmur flowed the tide,
While by the fragrant flowery side
The lovely maid, with carols gay,
To Mary's church pursued her way.

The water-fiend's malignant eye
Along the banks beheld her hie;
Straight to his mother-witch he sped,
And thus in suppliant accents said:

"Oh! mother! mother! now advise,
How I may yonder maid surprise:
Oh! mother! mother! now explain,
How I may yonder maid obtain."

The witch, she gave him armour white;
She formed him like a gallant knight;
Of water clear next made her hand
A steed, whose housings were of sand.

The water-king then swift he went;
To Mary's church his steps he bent:
He bound his courser to the door,
And paced the church-yard three times four.

His courser to the door bound he,
And paced the church-yard four times three:
Then hastened up the aisle, where all
The people flocked both great and small.

The priest said, as the knight drew near,
"And wherefore comes the white chief here?"
The lovely maid, she smiled aside;
"Oh! would I were the white chief's bride!"

He stepped o'er benches once and two;
"Oh! lovely maid I die for you!"
He stepped o'er benches two and three;
"Oh! lovely maiden, go with me!"

Then sweet she smiled, the lovely maid;
And while she gave her hand, she said,
"Betide me joy, betide me woe,
O'er hill, o'er dale, with thee I go."

The priest their hands together joins:
They dance, while clear the moon-beam shines;
And little thinks the maiden bright,
Her partner is the water-sprite.

Oh! had some spirits deigned to sing,
"Your bride-groom is the water-king!"
The maid had fear and hate confessed,
And cursed the hand which then she pressed.

But nothing giving cause to think
How near she strayed to danger's brink,
Still on she went, and hand in hand
The lovers reached the yellow sand.

"Ascend this steed with me, my dear!
We needs must cross the streamlet here:
Ride boldly in: it is not deep;
The winds are hushed, the billows sleep."

Thus spoke the water-king. The maid
Her traitor bride-groom's wish obeyed:
And soon she saw the courser lave
Delighted in his parent wave.

"Stop! stop! my love! The waters blue
E'en now my shrinking foot bedew."
"Oh! lay aside your fears, sweetheart!
We now have reached the deepest part."

"Stop! stop! my love! For now I see
The waters rise above my knee."
"Oh! lay aside your fears, sweetheart!
We now have reached the deepest part."

"Stop! stop! for God's sake stop! For, oh!
The waters o'er my bosom flow!"—
Scarce was the word pronounced, when knight
And courser vanished from her sight.

She shrieks, but shrieks in vain; for high
The wild winds rising dull the cry;
The fiend exults; the billows dash,
And o'er their hapless victim wash.

Three times, while struggling with the stream,
The lovely maid was heard to scream;
But when the tempest's rage was o'er,
The lovely maid was seen no more.

Warned by this tale, ye damsels fair,
To whom you give your love beware!
Believe not every handsome knight,
And dance not with the water-sprite!

The youth ceased to sing. The nuns were delighted with the sweetness of his voice, and masterly manner of touching the instrument: but however acceptable this applause would have been at any other time, at present it was insipid to Theodore. His artifice had not succeeded. He paused in vain between the stanzas; no voice replied to his, and he abandoned the hope of equalling Blondel.

The convent-bell now warned the nuns that it was time to assemble in the refectory. They were obliged to quit the grate: they thanked the youth for the entertainment which his music had afforded them, and charged him to return the next day. This he promised. The nuns, to give him the greater inclination to keep his word, told him that he might always depend upon the convent for his meals, and each of them made him some little present. One gave him a box of sweetmeats; another, an agnus dei; some brought reliques of saints, waxen images, and consecrated crosses; and others presented him with pieces of those works in which the religious excel, such as embroidery, artificial flowers, lace and needlework. All these he was advised to sell, in order to put

himself into better case; and he was assured that it would be easy to dispose of them, since the Spaniards hold the performances of the nuns in high estimation. Having received these gifts with seeming respect and gratitude, he remarked, that, having no basket, he knew not how to convey them away. Several of the nuns were hastening in search of one, when they were stopped by the return of an elderly woman, whom Theodore had not till then observed. Her mild countenance and respectable air prejudiced him immediately in her favour.

“Hah!” said the porteress, “here comes the mother St. Ursula with a basket.”

The nun approached the grate, and presented the basket to Theodore: it was of willow, lined with blue satin, and upon the four sides were painted scenes from the legend of St. Genevieve.

“Here is my gift,” said she, as she gave it into his hand: “Good youth, despise it not. Though its value seems insignificant, it has many hidden virtues.”

She accompanied these words with an expressive look. It was not lost upon Theodore. In receiving the present, he drew as near the grate as possible.

“Agnes!” she whispered in a voice scarcely intelligible.

Theodore, however, caught the sound. He con-

cluded that some mystery was concealed in the basket, and his heart beat with impatience and joy. At this moment the domina returned. Her air was gloomy and frowning, and she looked if possible more stern than ever.

"Mother St. Ursula, I would speak with you in private."

The nun changed colour, and was evidently disconcerted.

"With me?" she replied in a faltering voice.

The domina motioned that she must follow her, and retired. The mother St. Ursula obeyed her. Soon after, the refectory bell ringing a second time, the nuns quitted the grate, and Theodore was left at liberty to carry off his prize. Delighted that at length he had obtained some intelligence for the marquis, he flew rather than ran till he reached the hotel de las Cisternas. In a few minutes he stood by his master's bed with the basket in his hand. Lorenzo was in the chamber, endeavouring to reconcile his friend to a misfortune which he felt himself but too severely. Theodore related his adventure, and the hopes which had been created by the mother St. Ursula's gift. The marquis started from his pillow. The fire which since the death of Agnes had been extinguished, now revived in his bosom, and his eyes sparkled with the eagerness of expectation. The emotions which Lorenzo's counte-

nance betrayed were scarcely weaker, and he waited with inexpressible impatience for the solution of this mystery. Raymond caught the basket from the hands of his page: he emptied its contents upon the bed, and examined them with minute attention. He hoped that a letter would be found at the bottom. Nothing of the kind appeared. The search was resumed, and still with no better success. At length Don Raymond observed, that one corner of the blue satin lining was unripped: he tore it open hastily, and drew forth a small scrap of paper, neither folded or sealed. It was addressed to the marquis de las Cisternas, and the contents were as follows:

"Having recognised your page, I venture to send these few lines. Procure an order from the cardinal-duke for seizing my person, and that of the domina; but let it not be executed till Friday at midnight. It is the festival of St. Clare: there will be a procession of nuns by torch-light, and I shall be among them. Beware, not to let your intention be known. Should a syllable be dropped to excite the domina's suspicions, you will never hear of me more. Be cautious, if you prize the memory of Agnes, and wish to punish her assassins. I have that to tell, will freeze your blood with horror. ST. URSULA."

No sooner had the marquis read the note, than he

fell back upon his pillow, deprived of sense or motion. The hoped failed him which till now had supported his existence; and these lines convinced him but too positively that Agnes was indeed no more. Lorenzo felt this circumstance less forcibly, since it had always been his idea that his sister had perished by unfair means. When he found by the mother St. Ursula's letter how true were his suspicions, the confirmation excited no other sentiment in his bosom than a wish to punish the murderers as they deserved. It was no easy task to recall the marquis to himself. As soon as he recovered his speech, he broke out into execrations against the assassins of his beloved, and vowed to take upon them a signal vengeance. He continued to rave and torment himself with impotent passion, till his constitution, enfeebled by grief and illness, could support itself no longer, and relapsed into insensibility. His melancholy situation sincerely affected Lorenzo, who would willingly have remained in the apartment of his friend; but other cares now demanded his presence. It was necessary to procure the order for the seizing the prioress of St. Clare. For this purpose, having committed Raymond to the care of the best physician in Madrid, he quitted the hotel de las Cisternas, and bent his course towards the palace of the cardinal-duke.

His disappointment was excessive, when he found

that affairs of state had obliged the cardinal to set out for a distant province. It wanted but five days to Friday: yet, by travelling day and night, he hoped to return in time for the pilgrimage of St. Clare. In this he succeeded. He found the cardinal-duke, and represented to him the supposed culpability of the prioress, as also the violent effects which it had produced upon Don Raymond. He could have used no argument so forcible as this last. Of all his nephews the marquis was the only one to whom the cardinal-duke was sincerely attached: he perfectly doted upon him, and the prioress could have committed no greater crime in his eyes, than to have endangered the life of the marquis. Consequently, he granted the order of arrest without difficulty. He also gave Lorenzo a letter to a principal officer of the Inquisition, desiring him to see his mandate executed. Furnished with these papers, Medina hastened back to Madrid, which he reached on the Friday a few hours before dark. He found the marquis somewhat easier, but so weak and exhausted, that without great exertion he could neither speak nor move. Having passed an hour by his bed-side, Lorenzo left him to communicate his designs to his uncle, as also to give Don Ramirez de Mello the cardinal's letter. The first was petrified with horror, when he learned the fate of his unhappy niece. He encouraged Lorenzo to punish her assassins, and

engaged to accompany him at night to St. Clare's convent. Don Ramirez promised his firmest support, and selected a band of trusty archers to prevent opposition on the part of the populace.

But while Lorenzo was anxious to unmask one religious hypocrite, he was unconscious of the sorrows prepared for him by another. Aided by Matilda's infernal agents, Ambrosio had resolved upon the innocent Antonia's ruin. The moment destined to be fatal to her arrived. She had taken leave of her mother for the night. As she kissed her, she felt an unusual despondency infuse itself into her bosom. She left her, and returned to her instantly, threw herself into her maternal arms, and bathed her cheek with tears. She felt uneasy at quitting her, and a secret presentiment assured her that they must never meet again. Elvira observed, and tried to laugh her out of this childish prejudice. She chid her mildly for encouraging such ungrounded sadness, and warned her how dangerous it was to give way to such ideas.

To all her remonstrances she received no other answer than—

“Mother! Dear mother! Oh! would to God it were morning!”

Elvira, whose inquietude respecting her daughter was a great obstacle to her perfect re-establishment, was still labouring under the effects of her late severe

illness. She was this evening more than usually indisposed, and retired to bed before her accustomed hour. Antonia withdrew from her mother's chamber with regret, and, till the door closed, kept her eyes fixed upon her with melancholy expression. She retired to her own apartment: her heart was filled with bitterness. It seemed to her that all her prospects were blasted, and the world contained nothing for which it was worth existing. She sank into a chair, reclined her head upon her arm, and gazed upon the floor with a vacant stare, while the most gloomy images floated before her fancy. She was still in this state of insensibility, when she was disturbed by hearing a strain of soft music breathed beneath her window. She rose, drew near the casement, and opened it to hear more distinctly. Having thrown her veil over her face, she ventured to look out. By the light of the moon she perceived several men below with guitars and lutes in their hands; and at a little distance from them stood another wrapped in his cloak, whose stature and appearance bore a strong resemblance to Lorenzo's. She was not deceived in this conjecture. It was indeed Lorenzo himself, who, bound by his word not to present himself to Antonia without his uncle's consent, endeavoured, by occasional serenades, to convince his mistress that his attachment still existed. His stratagem had not the desired effect. Antonia was far from

supposing that this nightly music was intended as a compliment to her. She was too modest to think herself worthy such attentions; and concluding them to be addressed to some neighbouring lady, she grieved to find that they were offered by Lorenzo.

The air which was played was plaintive and melodious. It accorded with the state of Antonia's mind, and she listened with pleasure. After a symphony of some length, it was succeeded by the sound of voices, and Antonia distinguished the following words:

SERENADE.

CHORUS.

Oh! breathe in gentle strain, my lyre!
'Tis here that beauty loves to rest:
Describe the pangs of fond desire,
Which rend a faithful lover's breast.

SONG.

In every heart to find a slave,
In every soul to fix his reign,
In bonds to lead the wise and brave,
And make the captives kiss his chain:
Such is the power of Love, and oh!
I grieve so well Love's power to know.

In sighs to pass the live-long day,
To taste a short and broken sleep,
For one dear object far away,
All others scorned, to watch and weep:
Such are the pains of Love, and oh!
I grieve so well Love's pains to know.

To read consent in virgin eyes,
To press the lip ne'er prest till then,
To hear the sigh of transport rise,
And kiss, and kiss, and kiss again;
Such are thy pleasures, Love, but oh!
When shall my heart thy pleasures know?

CHORUS.

Now hush, my lyre! My voice be still!
Sleep, gentle maid! May fond desire
With amorous thoughts thy visions fill.
Though still my voice, and hushed my lyre!

The music ceased: the performers dispersed, and silence prevailed through the street. Antonia quitted the window with regret. She, as usual, recommended herself to the protection of St. Rosolia, said her accustomed prayers and retired to bed. Sleep was not long absent, and his presence relieved her from her terrors and inquietude.

It was almost two o'clock before the lustful monk ventured to bend his steps towards Antonia's dwelling. It has been already mentioned, that the abbey was at no great distance from the strada di San Iago. He reached the house unobserved. Here he stopped, and hesitated for a moment. He reflected on the enormity of the crime, the consequences of a discovery, and the probability, after what had passed, of Elvira's suspecting him to be her daughter's ravisher. On the other hand it was suggested, that she could do no

more than suspect: that no proofs of his guilt could be produced; that it would seem impossible for the rape to have been committed without Antonia's knowing when, where, or by whom; and finally, he believed that his fame was too firmly established to be shaken by the unsupported accusations of two unknown women. This latter argument was perfectly false. He knew not how uncertain is the air of popular applause, and that a moment suffices to make him to-day the detestation of the world, who yesterday was its idol. The result of the monk's deliberations was, that he should proceed in his enterprise. He ascended the steps leading to the house. No sooner did he touch the door with the silver myrtle, than it flew open, and presented him with a free passage. He entered, and the door closed after him of its own accord.

Guided by the moon-beams, he proceeded up the stair-case with slow and cautious steps. He looked round him every moment with apprehension and anxiety. He saw a spy in every shadow, and heard a voice in every murmur of the night-breeze. Consciousness of the guilty business on which he was employed appalled his heart, and rendered it more timid than a woman's. Yet still he proceeded. He reached the door of Antonia's chamber. He stopped and listened. All was hushed within. The total silence persuaded him that his intended victim was retired to rest, and he

ventured to lift up the latch. The door was fastened, and resisted his efforts. But no sooner was it touched by the talisman, than the bolt flew back. The ravisher stepped on, and found himself in the chamber, where slept the innocent girl, unconscious how dangerous a visitor was drawing near her couch. The door closed after him, and the bolt shot again into its fastening.

Ambrosio advanced with precaution. He took care not a board should creak under his foot, and held in his breath as he approached the bed. His first attention was to perform the magic ceremony, as Matilda had charged him: he breathed thrice upon the silver myrtle, pronounced over it Antonia's name, and laid it upon her pillow. The effects which it had already produced, permitted not his doubting its success in prolonging the slumbers of his devoted mistress. No sooner was the enchantment performed, than he considered her to be absolutely in his power, and his eyes flashed with lust and impatience. He now ventured to cast a glance upon the sleeping beauty. A single lamp, burning before the statue of St. Rosolia, shed a faint light through the room, and permitted him to examine all the charms of the lovely object before him. The heat of the weather had obliged her to throw off part of the bed-clothes. Those which still covered her Ambrosio's insolent hand hastened to remove. She lay with her cheek reclining upon one ivory arm: the

other rested on the side of the bed with graceful indolence. A few tresses of her hair had escaped from beneath the muslin which confined the rest, and fell carelessly over her bosom, as it heaved with slow and regular suspiration. The warm air had spread her cheek with higher colour than usual. A smile inexpressibly sweet played round her ripe and coral lips, from which every now and then escaped a gentle sigh, or an half-pronounced sentence. An air of enchanting innocence and candour pervaded her whole form; and there was a sort of modesty in her very nakedness, which added fresh stings to the desires of the lustful monk.

He remained for some moments devouring those charms with his eyes, which soon were to be subjected to his ill-regulated passions. Her mouth half opened seemed to solicit a kiss: he bent over her: he joined his lips to hers, and drew in the fragrance of her breath with rapture. This momentary pleasure increased his longing for still greater. His desires were raised to that frantic height by which brutes are agitated. He resolved not to delay for one instant longer the accomplishment of his wishes, and hastily proceeded to tear off those garments which impeded the gratification of his lust.

“Gracious God!” exclaimed a voice behind him: “Am I not deceived? Is not this an illusion?”

Terror, confusion, and disappointment accompanied these words, as they struck Ambrosio's hearing. He started, and turned towards it. Elvira stood at the door of the chamber, and regarded the monk with looks of surprise and detestation.

A frightful dream had represented to her Antonia on the verge of a precipice. She saw her trembling on the brink every moment seemed to threaten her fall, and she heard her exclaim with shrieks, "Save me, mother! save me!—yet a moment, and it will be too late." Elvira woke in terror. The vision had made too strong an impression upon her mind, to permit her resting till assured of her daughter's safety. She hastily started from her bed, threw on a loose night-gown, and, passing through the closet in which slept the waiting-woman, reached Antonia's chamber just in time to rescue her from the grasp of the ravisher.

His shame and her amazement seemed to have petrified into statues both Elvira and the monk. They remained gazing upon each other in silence. The lady was the first to recover herself.

"It is no dream," she cried: "it is really Ambrosio, who stands before me. It is the man whom Madrid esteems a saint, that I find at this late hour near the couch of my unhappy child. Monster of hypocrisy! I already suspected your designs, but forbore your

accusation in pity to human frailty. Silence would now be criminal. The whole city shall be informed of your incontinence. I will unmask you, villain, and convince the church what a viper she cherishes in her bosom."

Pale and confused, the baffled culprit stood trembling before her. He would fain have extenuated his offence, but could find no apology for his conduct. He could produce nothing but broken sentences, and excuses which contradicted each other. Elvira was too justly incensed to grant the pardon which he requested. She protested that she would raise the neighbourhood, and make him an example to all future hypocrites. Then hastening to the bed, she called to Antonia to wake; and finding that her voice had no effect, she took her arm, and raised her forcibly from the pillow. The charm acted too powerfully. Antonia remained insensible; and, on being released by her mother, sank back upon the pillow.

"This slumber cannot be natural," cried the amazed Elvira, whose indignation increased with every moment: "some mystery is concealed in it. But tremble, hypocrite! All your villainy shall soon be unravelled. Help! help!" she exclaimed aloud: "Within there! Flora! Flora!"

"Hear me for one moment, lady!" cried the monk, restored to himself by the urgency of the danger: "by

all that is sacred and holy, I swear that your daughter's honour is still unviolated. Forgive my transgression! Spare me the shame of a discovery, and permit me to regain the abbey undisturbed. Grant me this request in mercy! I promise not only that Antonia shall be secure from me in future, but that the rest of my life shall prove——”

Elvira interrupted him abruptly.

“Antonia secure from you? *I* will secure her. You shall betray no longer the confidence of parents. Your iniquity shall be unveiled to the public eye. All Madrid shall shudder at your perfidy, your hypocrisy, and incontinence. What ho! there! Flora! Flora! I say.”

While she spoke thus, the remembrance of Agnes struck upon his mind. Thus had she sued to him for mercy, and thus had he refused her prayer! It was now his turn to suffer, and he could not but acknowledge that his punishment was just. In the meanwhile Elvira continued to call Flora to her assistance; but her voice was so choked with passion, that the servant, who was buried in slumber, was insensible to all her cries: Elvira dared not go towards the closet in which Flora slept, lest the monk should take that opportunity to escape. Such indeed was his intention: he trusted that, could he reach the abbey unobserved by any other than Elvira, her single testimony would not suffice to ruin

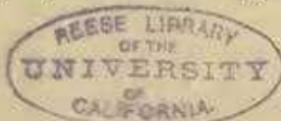
a reputation so well established as his was in Madrid. With this idea he gathered up such garments as he had already thrown off, and hastened towards the door. Elvira was aware of his design: she followed him, and, ere he could draw back the bolt, seized him by the arm, and detained him.

“Attempt not to fly!” said she: “you quit not this room without witnesses of your guilt.”

Ambrosio struggled in vain to disengage himself. Elvira quitted not her hold, but redoubled her cries for succour. The friar’s danger grew more urgent. He expected every moment to hear people assembling at her voice; and, worked up to madness by the approach of ruin, he adopted a resolution equally desperate and savage. Turning round suddenly, with one hand he grasped Elvira’s throat so as to prevent her continuing her clamour, and with the other dashing her violently upon the ground, he dragged her towards the bed. Confused by this unexpected attack, she scarcely had power to strive at forcing herself from his grasp: while the monk, snatching the pillow from beneath her daughter’s head, covering with it Elvira’s face, and pressing his knee upon her stomach with all his strength, endeavoured to put an end to her existence. He succeeded but too well. Her natural strength increased by the excess of anguish, long did the sufferer struggle to disengage herself, but in vain.

The monk continued to kneel upon her breast, witnessed without mercy the convulsive trembling of her limbs beneath him, and sustained with inhuman firmness the spectacle of her agonies, when soul and body were on the point of separating. Those agonies at length were over. She ceased to struggle for life. The monk took off the pillow, and gazed upon her. Her face was covered with a frightful blackness: her limbs moved no more: the blood was chilled in her veins: her heart had forgotten to beat; and her hands were stiff and frozen. Ambrosio beheld before him that once noble and majestic form, now become a corse, cold, senseless, and disgusting.

This horrible act was no sooner perpetrated than the friar beheld the enormity of his crime. A cold dew flowed over his limbs: his eyes closed: he staggered to a chair, and sank into it almost as lifeless as the unfortunate who lay extended at his feet. From this state he was roused by the necessity of flight, and the danger of being found in Antonia's apartment. He had no desire to profit by the execution of his crime. Antonia now appeared to him an object of disgust. A deadly cold had usurped the place of that warmth which glowed in his bosom. No ideas offered themselves to his mind but those of death and guilt, of present shame and future punishment. Agitated by remorse and fear, he prepared for flight: yet his



terrors did not so completely master his recollection, as to prevent his taking the precautions necessary for his safety. He replaced the pillow upon the bed, gathered up his garments, and, with the fatal talisman in his hand, bent his unsteady steps towards the door. Bewildered by fear, he fancied that his flight was opposed by legions of phantoms. Wherever he turned, the disfigured corse seemed to lie in his passage, and it was long before he succeeded in reaching the door. The enchanted myrtle produced its former effect. The door opened, and he hastened down the staircase. He entered the abbey unobserved; and having shut himself into his cell, he abandoned his soul to the tortures of unavailing remorse, and terrors of impending destruction.

CHAPTER IV.

Tell us, ye dead, will none of you in pity
To those you left behind disclose the secret?
O! that some courteous ghost would blab it out,
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be!
I've heard, that souls departed have sometimes
Fore-warned men of their deaths: 'twas kindly done,
To knock, and give the alarm.

BLAIR.



MBROSIO shuddered at himself when he reflected on his rapid advances in iniquity. The enormous crime which he had just committed, filled him with real horror. The murdered Elvira was continually before his eyes, and his guilt was already punished by the agonies of his conscience. Time, however, considerably weakened these impressions: one day passed away; another followed it, and still not the least suspicion was thrown upon him. Impunity reconciled him to his guilt. He began to resume his spirits; and as his fears of detection died away, he paid less attention to the reproaches of remorse.

Matilda exerted herself to quiet his alarms. At the first intelligence of Elvira's death, she seemed greatly affected, and joined the monk in deplored the unhappy catastrophe of his adventure: but when she found his agitation to be somewhat calmed, and himself better disposed to listen to her arguments, she proceeded to mention his offence in milder terms, and convince him that he was not so highly culpable as he appeared to consider himself. She represented, that he had only availed himself of the rights which nature allows to everyone, those of self preservation: that either Elvira or himself must have perished; and that her inflexibility and resolution to ruin him had deservedly marked her out for the victim. She next stated, that as he had before rendered himself suspected to Elvira, it was a fortunate event for him that her lips were closed by death; since, without this last adventure, her suspicions, if made public, might have produced very disagreeable consequences. He had therefore freed himself from an enemy, to whom the errors of his conduct were sufficiently known to make her dangerous, and who was the greatest obstacle to his designs upon Antonia. Those designs she encouraged him not to abandon. She assured him that, no longer protected by her mother's watchful eye, the daughter would fall an easy conquest; and by praising and enumerating Antonia's charms she strove to rekindle the desires of

the monk. In this endeavour she succeeded but too well.

As if the crimes into which his passion had seduced him had only increased its violence, he longed more eagerly than ever to enjoy Antonia. The same success in concealing his present guilt, he trusted, would attend his future. He was deaf to the murmurs of conscience, and resolved to satisfy his desires at any price. He waited only for an opportunity of repeating his former enterprise; but to procure that opportunity by the same means was now impracticable. In the first transports of despair he had dashed the enchanted myrtle into a thousand pieces. Matilda told him plainly, that he must expect no further assistance from the infernal powers, unless he was willing to subscribe to their established conditions. This Ambrosio was determined not to do. He persuaded himself that, however great might be his iniquity, so long as he preserved his claim to salvation, he need not despair of pardon. He therefore resolutely refused to enter into any bond or compact with the fiends; and Matilda finding him obdurate upon this point, forbore to press him further. She exerted her invention to discover some means of putting Antonia into the abbot's power: nor was it long before that means presented itself.

While her ruin was thus meditating, the unhappy girl herself suffered severely from the loss of her

mother. Every morning on waking, it was her first care to hasten to Elvira's chamber. On that which followed Ambrosio's fatal visit, she awoke later than was her usual custom: of this she was convinced by the abbey chimes. She started from her bed, threw on a few loose garments hastily, and was speeding to enquire how her mother had passed the night, when her foot struck against something which lay in her passage. She looked down. What was her horror at recognizing Elvira's livid corse! She uttered a loud shriek, and threw herself upon the floor. She clasped the inanimate form to her bosom, felt that it was dead-cold, and, with a movement of disgust, of which she was not the mistress, let it fall again from her arms. The cry had alarmed Flora, who hastened to her assistance. The sight which she beheld penetrated her with horror; but her alarm was more audible than Antonia's. She made the house ring with her lamentations, while her mistress, almost suffocated with grief, could only mark her distress by sobs and groans. Flora's shrieks soon reached the ears of the hostess, whose terror and surprise were excessive on learning the cause of this disturbance. A physician was immediately sent for; but on the first moment of beholding the corse, he declared that Elvira's recovery was beyond the power of art. He proceeded therefore to give his assistance to Antonia, who by this time was truly in

need of it. She was conveyed to bed, while the landlady busied herself in giving orders for Elvira's burial. Dame Jacintha was a plain good kind of woman, charitable, generous, and devout; but her intellects were weak, and she was a miserable slave to fear and superstition. She shuddered at the idea of passing the night in the same house with a dead body. She was persuaded that Elvira's ghost would appear to her, and no less certain that such a visit would kill her with fright. From this persuasion, she resolved to pass the night at a neighbour's, and insisted that the funeral should take place the next day. St. Clare's cemetery being the nearest, it was determined that Elvira should be buried there. Dame Jacintha engaged to defray every expense attending the burial. She knew not in what circumstances Antonia was left; but, from the sparing manner in which the family had lived, she concluded them to be indifferent: consequently she entertained very little hope of ever being recompensed. But this consideration prevented her not from taking care that the interment was performed with decency, and from shewing the unfortunate Antonia all possible respect.

Nobody dies of mere grief; of this Antonia was an instance. Aided by her youth and healthy constitution, she shook off the malady which her mother's death had occasioned; but it was not so easy to

remove the disease of her mind. Her eyes were constantly filled with tears; every trifle affected her, and she evidently nourished in her bosom a profound and rooted melancholy. The slightest mention of Elvira, the most trivial circumstance recalling that beloved parent to her memory, was sufficient to throw her into serious agitation. How much would her grief have been increased, had she known the agonies which terminated her mother's existence! But of this no one entertained the least suspicion. Elvira was subject to strong convulsions: it was supposed that, aware of their approach, she had dragged herself to her daughter's chamber in hopes of assistance; that a sudden access of her fits had seized her, too violent to be resisted by her already enfeebled state of health; and that she had expired ere she had time to reach the medicine which generally relieved her, and which stood upon a shelf in Antonia's room. This idea was firmly credited by the few people who interested themselves about Elvira. Her death was esteemed a natural event, and soon forgotten by all, save by her, who had but too much reason to deplore her loss.

In truth Antonia's situation was sufficiently embarrassing and unpleasant. She was alone in the midst of a dissipated and expensive city; she was ill provided with money, and worse with friends. Her aunt Leonella was still at Cordova, and she knew not

her direction. Of the marquis de las Cisternas she heard no news. As to Lorenzo, she had long given up the idea of possessing any interest in his bosom. She wished to consult Ambrosio, but she remembered her mother's injunctions to shun him as much as possible; and the last conversation which Elvira had held with her upon the subject, had given her sufficient lights respecting his designs, to put her upon her guard against him in future. Still all her mother's warnings could not make her change her good opinion of the friar. She continued to feel that his friendship and society were requisite to her happiness: she looked upon his failings with a partial eye, and could not persuade herself that he really had intended her ruin. However, Elvira had positively commanded her to drop his acquaintance, and she had too much respect for her orders to disobey them.

At length she resolved to address herself for advice and protection to the marquis de las Cisternas, as being her nearest relation. She wrote to him, briefly stating her desolate situation; she besought him to compassionate his brother's child, to continue to her Elvira's pension, and to authorise her retiring to his old castle in Murcia, which till now had been her retreat. Having sealed her letter, she gave it to the trusty Flora, who immediately set out to execute her commission. But Antonia was born under an unlucky star. Had

she made her application to the marquis but one day sooner, received as his niece, and placed at the head of his family, she would have escaped all the misfortunes with which she was now threatened. Raymond had always intended to execute this plan: but first, his hopes of making the proposal to Elvira through the lips of Agnes, and afterwards his disappointment at losing his intended bride, as well as the severe illness which for some time had confined him to his bed, made him defer from day to day the giving an asylum in his house to his brother's widow. He had commissioned Lorenzo to supply her liberally with money. But Elvira, unwilling to receive obligations from that nobleman, had assured him that she needed no immediate pecuniary assistance. Consequently the marquis did not imagine that a trifling delay on his part would create any embarrassment; and the distress and agitation of his mind might well excuse his negligence.

Had he been informed that Elvira's death had left her daughter friendless and unprotected, he would doubtless have taken such measures as would have ensured her from danger. But Antonia was not destined to be so fortunate. The day on which she sent her letter to the palace de las Cisternas, was that following Lorenzo's departure from Madrid. The marquis was in the first paroxysms of despair at the conviction that Agnes was indeed no more: he was

delirious; and, his life being in danger, no one was suffered to approach him. Flora was informed that he was incapable of attending to letters, and that probably a few hours would decide his fate. With this unsatisfactory answer she was obliged to return to her mistress, who now found herself plunged into greater difficulties than ever.

Flora and Dame Jacintha exerted themselves to console her. The latter begged her to make herself easy, for that as long as she chose to stay with her she would treat her like her own child. Antonia, finding that the good woman had taken a real affection for her, was somewhat comforted by thinking that she had at least one friend in the world. A letter was now brought to her, directed to Elvira. She recognised Leonella's writing, and, opening it with joy, found a detailed account of her aunt's adventures at Cordova. She informed her sister that she had recovered her legacy, had lost her heart, and received in exchange that of the most amiable of apothecaries, past, present, and to come. She added that she should be at Madrid on the Tuesday night, and meant to have the pleasure of presenting her caro sposo in form. Though her nuptials were far from pleasing Antonia, Leonella's speedy return gave her niece much delight. She rejoiced in thinking that she should once more be under a relation's care. She could not but judge it to

be highly improper for a young woman to be living among absolute strangers, with no one to regulate her conduct, or protect her from the insults to which in her defenceless situation she was exposed. She therefore looked forward with impatience to the Tuesday night.

It arrived. Antonia listened anxiously to the carriages as they rolled along the street. None of them stopped, and it grew late without Leonella's appearing. Still Antonia resolved to sit up till her aunt's arrival; and, in spite of all her remonstrances, Dame Jacintha and Flora insisted upon doing the same. The hours passed on slow and tediously. Lorenzo's departure from Madrid had put a stop to the nightly serenades: she hoped in vain to hear the usual sound of guitars beneath her window. She took up her own, and struck a few chords; but music that evening had lost its charms for her, and she soon replaced the instrument in its case. She seated herself at her embroidery frame, but nothing went right: the silks were missing, the thread snapped every moment, and the needles were so expert at falling that they seemed to be animated. At length a flake of wax fell from the taper which stood near her upon a favourite wreath of violets: this completely discomposed her; she threw down her needle and quitted the frame. It was decreed that for that night nothing should have

the power of amusing her. She was the prey of ennui, and employed herself in making fruitless wishes for the arrival of her aunt.

As she walked with a listless air up and down the chamber, the door caught her eye conducting to that which had been her mother's. She remembered that Elvira's little library was arranged there, and thought that she might possibly find in it some book to amuse her till Leonella should arrive. Accordingly she took her taper from the table, passed through the little closet, and entered the adjoining apartment. As she looked around her, the sight of this room brought to her recollection a thousand painful ideas. It was the first time of her entering it since her mother's death. The total silence prevailing through the chamber, the bed despoiled of its furniture, the cheerless hearth where stood an extinguished lamp, and a few dying plants in the window, which since Elvira's loss had been neglected, inspired Antonia with a melancholy awe. The gloom of night gave strength to this sensation. She placed her light upon the table, and sunk into a large chair, in which she had seen her mother seated a thousand and a thousand times. She was never to see her seated there again! Tears unbidden streamed down her cheek, and she abandoned herself to the sadness which grew deeper with every moment.

Ashamed of her weakness, she at length rose from

her seat; she proceeded to seek for what had brought her to this melancholy scene. The small collection of books was arranged upon several shelves in order. Antonia examined them without finding anything likely to interest her, till she put her hand upon a volume of old Spanish ballads. She read a few stanzas of one of them. They excited her curiosity. She took down the book, and seated herself to peruse it with ease. She trimmed the taper, which now drew towards its end, and then read the following ballad:

ALONZO THE BRAVE AND FAIR IMOGINE.

A warrior so bold and a virgin so bright
Conversed, as they sat on the green;
They gazed on each other with tender delight:
Alonzo the Brave was the name of the knight,
The maid's was the Fair Imogine.

"And, oh!" said the youth, "since to-morrow I go
To fight in a far distant land,
Your tears for my absence soon leaving to flow,
Some other will court you, and you will bestow
On a wealthier suitor your hand."

"Oh! hush these suspicions," Fair Imogine said,
"Offensive to love and to me!
For if you be living, or if you be dead,
I swear by the virgin that none in your stead
Shall husband of Imogine be."

"If e'er I, by lust or by wealth led aside,
Forget my Alonzo the Brave,
God grant, that to punish my falsehood and pride,
Your ghost at the marriage may sit by my side,
May tax me with perjury, claim me as bride,
And bear me away to the grave!"

To Palestine hastened the hero so bold;
His love, she lamented him sore:
But scarce had a twelvemonth elapsed, when behold,
A Baron all covered with jewels and gold
Arrived at Fair Imogine's door.

His treasure, his presents, his spacious domain
Soon made her untrue to her vows:
He dazzled her eyes; he bewildered her brain;
He caught her affections so light and so vain,
And carried her home as his spouse.

And now had the marriage been blest by the priest;
The revelry now was begun:
The tables they groaned with the weight of the feast;
Nor yet had the laughter and merriment ceased,
When the bell of the castle told—"one!"

Then first with amazement Fair Imogine found
That a stranger was placed by her side:
His air was terrific; he uttered no sound;
He spoke not, he moved not, he looked not around,
But earnestly gazed on the bride.

His vizor was closed, and gigantic his height;
His armour was sable to view:
All pleasure and laughter were hushed at his sight;
The dogs as they eyed him drew back in affright;
The lights in the chamber burned blue!

His presence all bosoms appeared to dismay;
 The guests sat in silence and fear,
 At length spoke the bride, while she trembled: "I pray,
 Sir Knight, that your helmet aside you would lay,
 And deign to partake of our cheer."

The lady is silent: the stranger complies,
 His vizor he slowly unclosed;
 Oh! God! what a sight met Fair Imogene's eyes
 What words can express her dismay and surprise,
 When a skeleton's head was exposed!

All present then uttered a terrified shout;
 All turned with disgust from the scene.
 The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out,
 And sported his eyes and his temples about,
 While the spectre addressed Imogene:

"Behold me, thou false one! behold me!" he cried;
 "Remember Alonzo the Brave!
 God grant, that to punish thy falsehood and pride
 My ghost at thy marriage should sit by thy side,
 Should tax thee with perjury, claim thee as bride,
 And bear thee away to the grave!"

Thus saying, his arms round the lady he wound,
 While loudly she shrieked in dismay;
 Then sank with his prey through the wide-yawning ground;
 Nor ever again was Fair Imogene found,
 Or the spectre who bore her away.

Not long lived the Baron; and none since that time
 To inhabit the castle presume;
 For chronicles tell that, by order sublime,
 There Imogene suffers the pain of her crime,
 And mourns her deplorable doom.

At midnight four times in each year does her sprite,
When mortals in slumber are bound,
Arrayed in her bridal apparel of white,
Appear in the hall with the Skeleton-Knight,
And shriek as he whirls her around.

While they drink out of skulls newly torn from the grave,
Dancing round them the spectres are seen;
Their liquor is blood, and this horrible stave
They howl—“To the health of Alonzo the Brave,
And his consort, the False Imogene!”

The perusal of this story was ill calculated to dispel Antonia's melancholy. She had naturally a strong inclination to the marvellous; and her nurse, who believed firmly in apparitions, had related to her, when an infant, so many horrible adventures of this kind, that all Elvira's attempts had failed to eradicate their impressions from her daughter's mind. Antonia still nourished a superstitious prejudice in her bosom: she was often susceptible of terrors, which, when she discovered their natural and insignificant cause, made her blush at her own weakness. With such a turn of mind, the adventure which she had just been reading sufficed to give her apprehensions the alarm. The hour and the scene combined to authorise them. It was the dead of night; she was alone, and in the chamber once occupied by her deceased mother. The weather was comfortless and stormy; the wind howled around the house, the doors rattled in their frames,

and the heavy rain pattered against the windows. No other sound was heard. The taper, now burnt down to the socket, sometimes flaring upwards, shot a gleam of light through the room, then sinking again seemed upon the point of expiring. Antonia's heart throbbed with agitation; her eyes wandered fearfully over the objects around her, as the trembling flame illuminated them at intervals. She attempted to rise from her seat, but her limbs trembled so violently that she was unable to proceed. She then called Flora, who was in a room at no great distance; but agitation choked her voice, and her cries died away in hollow murmurs.

She passed some minutes in this situation, after which her terrors began to diminish. She strove to recover herself and acquire strength enough to quit the room. Suddenly she fancied that she heard a low sigh drawn near her. This idea brought back her former weakness. She had already raised herself from her seat, and was on the point of taking the lamp from the table. The imaginary noise stopped her; she drew back her hand, and supported herself upon the back of a chair. She listened anxiously, but nothing more was heard.

“Gracious God!” she said to herself, “what could be that sound? Was I deceived, or did I really hear it?”

Her reflections were interrupted by a voice at the door scarcely audible; it seemed as if somebody was

whispering. Antonia's alarm increased; yet the bolt she knew to be fastened, and this idea in some degree re-assured her. Presently the latch was lifted up softly, and the door moved with caution backwards and forwards. Excess of terror now supplied Antonia with that strength, of which she had till then been deprived. She started from her place and made towards the closet door, whence she might soon have reached the chamber where she expected to find Flora and Dame Jacintha. Scarcely had she reached the middle of the room, when the latch was lifted up a second time. An involuntary movement obliged her to turn her head. Slowly and gradually the door turned upon its hinges, and standing upon the threshold she beheld a tall thin figure, wrapped in a white shroud which covered it from head to foot.

This vision arrested her feet; she remained as if petrified in the middle of the apartment. The stranger with measured and solemn steps drew near the table. The dying taper darted a blue and melancholy flame as the figure advanced towards it. Over the table was fixed a small clock; the hand of it was upon the stroke of three. The figure stopped opposite to the clock; it raised its right arm, and pointed to the hour, at the same time looking earnestly upon Antonia, who waited for the conclusion of this scene, motionless and silent.

The figure remained in this posture for some moments. The clock struck. When the sound had ceased, the stranger advanced yet a few steps nearer Antonia.

"Yet three days," said a voice, faint, hollow, and sepulchral; "yet three days, and we meet again!"

Antonia shuddered at the words.

"We meet again?" she pronounced at length with difficulty: "Where shall we meet? Whom shall I meet?"

The figure pointed to the ground with one hand, and with the other raised the linen which covered its face.

"Almighty God! My mother?"

Antonia shrieked, and fell lifeless upon the floor.

Dame Jacintha, who was at work in a neighbouring chamber, was alarmed by the cry: Flora was just gone down stairs to fetch fresh oil for the lamp by which they had been sitting. Jacintha therefore hastened alone to Antonia's assistance, and great was her amazement to find her extended upon the floor. She raised her in her arms, conveyed her to her apartment, and placed her upon the bed, still senseless. She then proceeded to bathe her temples, chafe her hands, and use all possible means of bringing her to herself. With some difficulty she succeeded. Antonia opened her eyes, and looked round her wildly.

"Where is she?" she cried in a trembling voice: "Is she gone?" Am I safe? Speak to me! Comfort me! Oh! speak to me, for God's sake!"

"Safe from whom, my child?" replied the astonished Jacintha: "What alarms you? Of whom are you afraid?"

"In three days! She told me that we should meet in three days! I heard her say it! I saw her, Jacintha, I saw her but this moment!"

She threw herself upon Jacintha's bosom.

"You saw her?—Saw whom?"

"My mother's ghost!"

"Christ Jesus!" cried Jacintha; and, starting from the bed, let fall Antonia upon the pillow, and fled in consternation out of the room.

As she hastened down stairs, she met Flora ascending them.

"Go to your mistress, Flora," said she; "here are rare doings! Oh! I am the most unfortunate woman alive! My house is filled with ghosts and dead bodies, and the Lord knows what besides; yet I am sure nobody likes such company less than I do. But go your way to Donna Antonia, Flora, and let me go mine."

Thus saying, she continued her course to the street door, which she opened; and, without allowing herself time to throw on her veil, she made the best of her way to the Capuchin abbey. In the meanwhile, Flora

hastened to her lady's chamber, equally surprised and alarmed at Jacintha's consternation. She found Antonia lying upon the bed, insensible. She used the same means for her recovery that Jacintha had already employed; but finding that her mistress only recovered from one fit to fall into another, she sent in all haste for a physician. While expecting his arrival, she undressed Antonia, and conveyed her to bed.

Heedless of the storm, terrified almost out of her senses, Jacintha ran through the streets, and stopped not till she reached the gate of the abbey. She rang loudly at the bell; and as soon as the porter appeared, she desired permission to speak to the superior. Ambrosio was then conferring with Matilda upon the means of procuring access to Antonia. The cause of Elvira's death remaining unknown, he was convinced that crimes were not so swiftly followed by punishment as his instructors the monks had taught him, and as till then he had himself believed. This persuasion made him resolve upon Antonia's ruin, for the enjoyment of whose person dangers and difficulties only seemed to have increased his passion. The monk had already made one attempt to gain admission to her presence; but Flora had refused him in such a manner as to convince him that all future endeavours must be vain. Elvira had confided her suspicions to that trusty servant: she had desired her never to leave Ambrosio

alone with her daughter, and, if possible to prevent their meeting altogether. Flora promised to obey her, and had executed her orders to the very letter. Ambrosio's visit had been rejected that morning, though Antonia was ignorant of it. He saw that to obtain a sight of his mistress by open means was out of the question; and both himself and Matilda had consumed the night in endeavouring to invent some plan, whose event might be more successful. Such was their employment when a lay brother entered the abbot's cell, and informed him that a woman calling herself Jacintha Zuniga requested audience for a few minutes.

Ambrosio was by no means disposed to grant the petition of his visitor. He refused it positively, and bade the lay brother tell the stranger to return the next day. Matilda interrupted him—

"See this woman," said she, in a low voice; "I have my reasons."

The abbot obeyed her, and signified that he would go to the parlour immediately. With this answer the lay brother withdrew. As soon as they were alone, Ambrosio enquired why Matilda wished him to see this Jacintha.

"She is Antonia's hostess," replied Matilda; "she may possibly be of use to you; but let us examine her, and learn what brings her hither."



They proceeded together to the parlour, where Jacintha was already waiting for the abbot. She had conceived a great opinion of his piety and virtue; and, supposing him to have much influence over the devil, thought that it must be an easy matter for him to lay Elvira's ghost in the Red Sea. Filled with this persuasion, she had hastened to the abbey. As soon as she saw the monk enter the parlour, she dropped upon her knees, and began her story as follows:

"Oh! reverend father! such an accident! such an adventure! I know not what course to take; and unless you can help me, I shall certainly go distracted. Well, to be sure, never was woman so unfortunate as myself! All in my power to keep clear of such abomination have I done, and yet that all is too little. What signifies my telling my beads four times a day, and observing every fast prescribed by the calendar? What signifies my having made three pilgrimages to St. James of Compostella, and purchased as many pardons from the pope as would buy off Cain's punishment? Nothing prospers with me! All goes wrong, and God only knows whether anything will ever go right again! Why now, be your holiness the judge—My lodger dies in convulsions; out of pure kindness I bury her at my own expense; [not that she is any relation of mine, or that I shall be benefited a single pistole by her death: I got nothing by it, and

therefore you know, reverend father, that her living or dying was just the same to me. But that is nothing to the purpose; to return to what I was saying], I took care of her funeral, had everything performed decently and properly, and put myself to expense enough, God knows! And how do you think the lady repays me for my kindness? Why truly by refusing to sleep quietly in her comfortable deal coffin, as a peaceable, well-disposed spirit ought to do, and coming to plague me, who never wish to set eyes on her again. Forsooth, it well becomes her to go racketing about my house at midnight, popping into her daughter's room through the keyhole, and frightening the poor child out of her wits! Though she be a ghost, she might be more civil than to bolt into a person's house who likes her company so little. But as for me, reverend father, the plain state of the case is this: if she walks into my house, I must walk out of it, for I cannot abide such visitors—not I. Thus you see, your sanctity, that without your assistance I am ruined and undone for ever. I shall be obliged to quit my house: nobody will take it when 'tis known that she haunts it, and then I shall find myself in a fine situation. Miserable woman that I am! what shall I do? what will become of me?"

Here she wept bitterly, wrung her hands, and begged to know the abbot's opinion of her case.

"In truth, good woman," replied he, "it will be difficult to relieve you, without knowing what is the matter with you. You have forgotten to tell me what has happened, and what it is you want."

"Let me die," cried Jacintha, "but your sanctity is in the right. This then is the fact stated briefly—A lodger of mine is lately dead; a very good sort of woman, that I must needs say for her; as far as my knowledge of her went, though that was not a great way. She kept me too much at a distance; for indeed she was given to be upon the high ropes; and whenever I ventured to speak to her, she had a look with her which always made me feel a little queerish: God forgive me for saying so! However, though she was more stately than needful, and affected to look down upon me (though, if I am well informed, I come of as good parents as she could do for her ears, for her father was a shoemaker at Cordova, and mine was an hatter at Madrid—aye, and a very creditable hatter too, let me tell you), yet for all her pride she was a quite well-behaved body, and I never wish to have a better lodger. This makes me wonder the more at her not sleeping quietly in her grave; but there is no trusting to people in this world. For my part, I never saw her do amiss, except on the Friday before her death. To be sure, I was then much scandalized by seeing her eat the wing of a chicken. 'How, Madona

Flora!' quoth I (Flora, may it please your reverence, is the name of the waiting-maid)—'how, Madona Flora,' quoth I, 'does your mistress eat flesh upon Fridays? Well! well! see the event, and then remember that Dame Jacintha warned you of it!' These were my very words; but, alas! I might as well have held my tongue. Nobody minded me: and Flora, who is somewhat pert and snappish (more is the pity, I say), told me that there was no more harm in eating a chicken than the egg from which it came: nay she even declared, that if her lady added a slice of bacon, she would not be an inch nearer damnation. God protect us! a poor ignorant sinful soul! I protest to your holiness, I trembled to hear her utter such blasphemies, and expected every moment to see the ground open and swallow her up, chicken and all; for you must know, worshipful father, that while she talked thus, she held the plate in her hand on which lay the identical roast fowl: and a fine bird it was, that I must say for it—done to a turn, for I superintended the cooking of it myself. It was a little galician of my own raising, may it please your holiness, and the flesh was as white as an egg-shell, as indeed Donna Elvira told me herself. 'Dame Jacintha,' said she very good-humouredly, though to say the truth she was always very polite to me—'

Here Ambrosio's patience failed him. Eager to

know Jacintha's business, in which Antonia seemed to be concerned, he was almost distracted while listening to the rambling of this prosing old woman. He interrupted her, and protested that if she did not immediately tell her story and have done with it, he should quit the parlour, and leave her to get out of her difficulties by herself. This threat had the desired effect. Jacintha related her business in as few words as she could manage: but her account was still so prolix, that Ambrosio had need of his patience to bear him to the conclusion.

"And so, your reverence," said she, after relating Elvira's death and burial, with all their circumstances — "and so, your reverence, upon hearing the shriek I put away my work, and away posted I to Donna Antonia's chamber. Finding nobody there, I passed on to the next: but I must own I was a little timorous at going in; for this was the very room where Donna Elvira used to sleep. However in I went, and sure enough there lay the young lady at full length upon the floor, as cold as a stone, and as white as a sheet. I was surprised at this, as your holiness may well suppose: but, oh me! how I shook when I saw a great tall figure at my elbow, whose head touched the ceiling! The face was Donna Elvira's, I must confess; but out of its mouth came clouds of fire; its arms were loaded with heavy chains, which it rattled piteously; and every

hair on its head was a serpent as big as my arm. At this I was frightened enough, and began to say my ave-maria; but the ghost interrupting me uttered three loud groans, and roared out in a terrible voice, 'Oh! that chicken's wing! my poor soul suffers for it.' As soon as she had said this, the ground opened, the spectre sank down; I heard a clap of thunder, and the room was filled with a smell of brimstone. When I recovered from my fright, and had brought Donna Antonia to herself, who told me that she had cried out upon seeing her mother's ghost (and well might she cry, poor soul! had I been in her place, I should have cried ten times louder), it directly came into my head, that if anyone had power to quiet this spectre, it must be your reverence. So hither I came in all diligence, to beg that you will sprinkle my house with holy water, and lay the apparition in the Red Sea."

Ambrosio stared at this strange story, which he could not credit.

"Did Donna Antonia also see the ghost?" said he.

"As plain as I see you, reverend father."

Ambrosio paused for a moment. Here was an opportunity afforded him of gaining access to Antonia, but he hesitated to employ it. The reputation which he enjoyed in Madrid was still dear to him; and since he had lost the reality of virtue, it appeared as if its

semblance was become more valuable. He was conscious that publicly to break through the rule never to quit the abbey-precincts would derogate much from his supposed austerity. In visiting Elvira, he had always taken care to keep his features concealed from the domestics. Except by the lady, her daughter, and the faithful Flora, he was known in the family by no other name than that of father Jerome. Should he comply with Jacintha's request, and accompany her to her house, he knew that the violation of this rule could not be kept a secret. However, his eagerness to see Antonia obtained the victory. He even hoped that the singularity of this adventure would justify him in the eyes of Madrid. But whatever might be the consequences, he resolved to profit by the opportunity which chance had presented to him. An expressive look from Matilda confirmed him in this resolution.

"Good woman," said he to Jacintha, "what you tell me is so extraordinary that I can scarcely credit your assertions. However, I will comply with your request. To-morrow, after matins, you may expect me at your house: I will then examine into what I can do for you; and, if it is in my power, will free you from this unwelcome visitor. Now then go home, and peace be with you!"

"Home!" exclaimed Jacintha; "I go home? Not I, by my troth!—except under your protection, I set

no foot of mine within the threshold. God help me! the ghost may meet me upon the stairs, and whisk me away with her to the devil! Oh! that I had accepted young Melchior Basco's offer! then I should have had somebody to protect me; but now I am a lone woman, and meet with nothing but crosses and misfortunes. Thank Heaven it is not yet too late to repent. There is Simon Gonzalez will have me any day of the week; and if I live till daybreak, I will marry him out of hand: an husband I will have, that is determined; for, now this ghost is once in my house, I shall be frightened out of my wits to sleep alone. But, for God's sake, reverend father! come with me now. I shall have no rest till the house is purified, or the poor young lady either. The dear girl! she is in a piteous taking: I left her in strong convulsions, and I doubt she will not easily recover her fright."

The friar started, and interrupted her hastily.

"In convulsions, say you? Antonia in convulsions? Lead on, good woman, I follow you this moment."

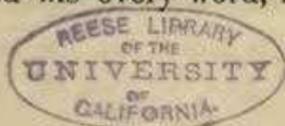
Jacintha insisted upon his stopping to furnish himself with the vessel of holy water. With this request he complied. Thinking herself safe under his protection should a legion of ghosts attack her, the old woman returned the monk a profusion of thanks, and they departed together for the strada di San Iago.

So strong an impression had the spectre made

upon Antonia, that for the first two or three hours the physician declared her life to be in danger. The fits at length becoming less frequent, induced him to alter his opinion. He said that to keep her quiet was all that was necessary; and he ordered a medicine to be prepared, which would tranquillize her nerves, and procure her that repose which at present she much wanted. The sight of Ambrosio, who now appeared with Jacintha at her bedside, contributed essentially to compose her ruffled spirits. Elvira had not sufficiently explained herself upon the nature of his designs, to make a girl so ignorant of the world as her daughter aware how dangerous was his acquaintance. At this moment, when penetrated with horror at the scene which had just passed, and dreading to contemplate the ghost's prediction, her mind had need of all the succours of friendship and religion, Antonia regarded the abbot with an eye doubly partial. That strong prepossession in his favour still existed, which she had felt for him at first sight: she fancied, yet knew not wherefore, that his presence was a safeguard to her from every danger, insult, or misfortune. She thanked him gratefully for his visit, and related to him the adventure which had alarmed her so seriously..

The abbot strove to reassure her and convince her that the whole had been a deception of her overheated fancy. The solitude in which she had passed

the evening, the gloom of night, the book which she had been reading, and the room in which she sat, were all calculated to place before her such a vision. He treated the idea of ghosts with ridicule, and produced strong arguments to prove the fallacy of such a system. His conversation tranquillized and comforted her, but did not convince her. She could not believe that the spectre had been a mere creature of her imagination: every circumstance was impressed upon her mind too forcibly to permit her flattering herself with such an idea. She persisted in asserting that she had really seen her mother's ghost, had heard the period of her dissolution announced, and declared that she never should quit her bed alive. Ambrosio advised her against encouraging these sentiments, and then quitted her chamber, having promised to repeat his visit on the morrow. Antonia received this assurance with every mark of joy: but the monk easily perceived that he was not equally acceptable to her attendant. Flora obeyed Elvira's injunctions with the most scrupulous observance. She examined with an anxious eye every circumstance likely in the least to prejudice her young mistress, to whom she had been attached for many years. She was a native of Cuba, had followed Elvira to Spain, and loved the young Antonia with a mother's affection. Flora quitted not the room for a moment while the abbot remained there: she watched his every word, his every



look, his every action. He saw that her suspicious eye was always fixed upon him; and, conscious that his designs would not bear inspection so minute, he felt frequently confused and disconcerted. He was aware that she doubted the purity of his intentions; that she would never leave him alone with Antonia; and, his mistress defended by the presence of this vigilant observer, he despaired of finding the means to gratify his passion.

As he quitted the house, Jacintha met him, and begged that some masses might be sung for the repose of Elvira's soul, which she doubted not was suffering in purgatory.

He promised not to forget her request; but he perfectly gained the old woman's heart by engaging to watch during the whole of the approaching night in the haunted chamber. Jacintha could find no terms sufficiently strong to express her gratitude, and the monk departed loaded with her benedictions.

It was broad day when he returned to the abbey. His first care was to communicate what had passed to his confidante. He felt too sincere a passion for Antonia, to have heard unmoved the prediction of her speedy death, and he shuddered at the idea of losing an object so dear to him. Upon this head Matilda reassured him. She confirmed the arguments which himself had already used: she declared Antonia to

have been deceived by the wandering of her brain, by the spleen which oppressed her at the moment, and by the natural turn of her mind to superstition and the marvellous. As to Jacintha's account, the absurdity refuted itself. The abbot hesitated not to believe that she had fabricated the whole story, either confused by terror, or hoping to make him comply more readily with her request. Having over-ruled the monk's apprehensions, Matilda continued thus:

"The prediction and the ghost are equally false: but it must be your care, Ambrosio, to verify the first. Antonia within three days must indeed be dead to the world: but she must live for you. Her present illness, and this fancy which she has taken into her head, will colour a plan which I have long meditated, but which was impracticable without your procuring access to Antonia. She shall be yours, not for a single night, but for ever. All the vigilance of her duenna shall not avail her. You shall riot unrestrained in the charms of your mistress. This very day must the scheme be put in execution, for you have no time to lose. The nephew of the duke of Medina Celi prepares to demand Antonia for his bride: in a few days she will be removed to the palace of her relation, the marquis de las Cisternas, and there she will be secure from your attempts. Thus during your absence have I been informed by my spies, who are ever employed in

bringing me intelligence for your service. Now then listen to me. There is a juice extracted from certain herbs known but to few, which brings on the person who drinks it the exact image of death. Let this be administered to Antonia: you may easily find means to pour a few drops into her medicine. The effect will be throwing her into strong convulsions for an hour: after which her blood will gradually cease to flow, and heart to beat: a mortal paleness will spread itself over her features, and she will appear a corse to every eye. She has no friends about her: you may charge yourself unsuspected with the superintendence of her funeral, and cause her to be buried in the vaults of St. Clare. Their solitude and easy access render these caverns favourable to your designs. Give Antonia the soporific draught this evening: eight-and-forty hours after she has drank it, life will revive in her bosom. She will then be absolutely in your power: she will find all resistance unavailing, and necessity will compel her to receive you in her arms."

"Antonia will be in my power!" exclaimed the monk; "Matilda, you transport me! At length then happiness will be mine, and that happiness will be Matilda's gift, will be the gift of friendship! I shall clasp Antonia in my arms, far from every prying eye, from every tormenting intruder! I shall sigh out my soul upon her bosom; shall teach her young

heart the first rudiments of pleasure, and revel uncontrolled in the endless variety of her charms! And shall this delight indeed be mine? Shall I give the reins to my desires, and gratify every wild tumultuous wish? Oh! Matilda, how can I express to you my gratitude?"

"By profiting by my counsels. Ambrosio, I live but to serve you; your interest and happiness are equally mine. Be your person Antonia's, but to your friendship and your heart I still assert my claim. Contributing to yours forms now my only pleasure. Should my exertions procure the gratifications of your wishes, I shall consider my trouble to be amply repaid. But let us lose no time. The liquor of which I spoke, is only to be found in St. Clare's laboratory. Hasten then to the prioress, request of her admission to the laboratory, and it will not be denied. There is a closet at the lower end of the great room, filled with liquids of different colours and qualities; the bottle in question stands by itself, upon the third shelf on the left. It contains a greenish liquor: fill a small phial with it when you are unobserved, and Antonia is your own."

The monk hesitated not to adopt this infamous plan. His desires but too violent before, had acquired fresh vigour from the sight of Antonia. As he sat by her bedside, accident had again betrayed to him some of those charms on which his eyes had dwelt with such delight on the night of Elvira's murder. Some-

times her white and polished arm was displayed in arranging the pillow; sometimes a sudden movement discovered part of her swelling bosom: but wherever the new-found charm presented itself, there rested the friar's gloating eyes. Scarcely could he master himself sufficiently to conceal his desires from Antonia and her vigilant duenna. Inflamed by the remembrance of these beauties, he entered into Matilda's scheme without hesitation.

No sooner were matins over, than he bent his course towards the convent of St. Clare; his arrival threw the whole sisterhood into the utmost amazement. The prioress was sensible of the honour done her convent by his paying it his first visit, and strove to express her gratitude by every possible attention. He was paraded through the garden, shewn all the reliques of saints and martyrs, and treated with as much respect and distinction as had he been the Pope himself. On his part, Ambrosio received the domina's civilities very graciously, and strove to remove her surprise at his having broken through his resolution. He stated that among his penitents, illness prevented many from quitting their houses. These were exactly the people who most needed his advice and the comforts of religion. Many representations had been made to him upon this account, and, though highly repugnant to his own wishes, he had found it absolutely necessary, for the

service of Heaven, to change his determination, and quit his beloved retirement. The prioress applauded his zeal in his profession, and his charity towards mankind. She declared that Madrid was happy in possessing a man so perfect and irreproachable. In such discourse the friar at length reached the laboratory: he found the closet; the bottle stood in the place which Matilda had described, and the monk seized an opportunity to fill his phial unobserved with the soporific liquor. Then, having partaken of a collation in the refectory, he retired from the convent, pleased with the success of his visit, and leaving the nuns delighted by the honour conferred upon them.

He waited till evening before he took the road to Antonia's dwelling. Jacintha welcomed him with transport, and besought him not to forget his promise to pass the night in the haunted chamber. That promise he now repeated. He found Antonia tolerably well, but still harping upon the ghost's prediction. Flora moved not from her lady's bed, and by symptoms yet stronger than on the former night, testified her dislike to the abbot's presence. Still Ambrosio affected not to observe them. The physician arrived while he was conversing with Antonia. It was dark already; lights were called for, and Flora was compelled to descend for them herself. However as she left a third person in the room, and expected to be absent but a

few minutes, she believed that she risked nothing in quitting her post. No sooner had she left the room, than Ambrosio moved towards the table, on which stood Antonia's medicine. It was placed in a recess of the window. The physician, seated in an arm-chair, and employed in questioning his patient, paid no attention to the proceedings of the monk. Ambrosio seized the opportunity; he drew out the fatal phial, and let a few drops fall into the medicine: he then hastily left the table, and returned to the seat which he had quitted. When Flora made her appearance with lights, everything seemed to be exactly as she had left it.

The physician declared that Antonia might quit her chamber the next day with perfect safety. He recommended her following the same prescription which on the night before had procured her a refreshing sleep. Flora replied, that the draught stood ready upon the table: he advised the patient to take it without delay, and then retired. Flora poured the medicine into a cup, and presented it to her mistress. At that moment Ambrosio's courage failed him. Might not Matilda have deceived him? Might not jealousy have persuaded her to destroy her rival, and substitute poison in the room of an opiate? This idea appeared so reasonable, that he was on the point of preventing her from swallowing the medicine. His resolution was adopted too late. The cup was already emptied, and Antonia

restored it into Flora's hands. No remedy was now to be found; Ambrosio could only expect the moment impatiently destined to decide upon Antonia's life or death, upon his own happiness or despair.

Dreading to create suspicion by his stay, or betray himself by his mind's agitation, he took leave of his victim, and withdrew from the room. Antonia parted from him with less cordiality than on the former night. Flora had represented to her mistress, that to admit his visits was to disobey her mother's orders. She described to her his emotion on entering the room, and the fire which sparkled in his eyes while he gazed upon her. This had escaped Antonia's observation, but not her attendant's, who explaining the monk's designs, and their probable consequences, in terms much clearer than Elvira's, though not quite so delicate, had succeeded in alarming her young lady, and persuading her to treat him more distantly than she had done hitherto. The idea of obeying her mother's will at once determined Antonia. Though she grieved at losing his society, she conquered herself sufficiently to receive the monk with some degree of reserve and coldness. She thanked him with respect and gratitude for his former visits, but did not invite his repeating them in future. It now was not the friar's interest to solicit admission to her presence, and he took leave of her as if not designing to return.

Fully persuaded that the acquaintance which she dreaded was now at an end, Flora was so much worked upon by his easy compliance, that she began to doubt the justice of her suspicions. As she lighted him down stairs, she thanked him for having endeavoured to root out from Antonia's mind her superstitious terrors of the spectre's prediction: she added, that as he seemed interested in Donna Antonia's welfare, should any change take place in her situation, she would be careful to let him know it. The monk, in replying, took pains to raise his voice, hoping that Jacintha would hear it. In this he succeeded. As he reached the foot of the stairs with his conductress, the landlady failed not to make her appearance.

"Why, surely you are not going away, reverend father?" cried she: "Did you not promise to pass the night in the haunted chamber? Christ Jesus! I shall be left alone with the ghost, and a fine pickle I shall be in by morning! Do all I could, say all I could, that obstinate old brute, Simon Gonzalez, refused to marry me to-day; and before to-morrow comes, I suppose I shall be torn to pieces by the ghosts and goblins, and devils, and what not! For God's sake, your holiness, do not leave me in such a woful condition! On my bended knees I beseech you to keep your promise: watch this night in the haunted chamber; lay the apparition in the Red Sea, and Jacintha

remembers you in her prayers to the last day of her existence!"

This request Ambrosio expected and desired; yet he affected to raise objections, and to seem unwilling to keep his word. He told Jacintha that the ghost excited nowhere but in her own brain, and that her insisting upon his staying all night in the house was ridiculous and useless. Jacintha was obstinate; she was not to be convinced, and pressed him so urgently not to leave her a prey to the devil, that at length he granted her request. All this show of resistance imposed not upon Flora, who was naturally of a suspicious temper. She suspected the monk to be acting a part very contrary to his own inclinations, and that he wished for no better than to remain where he was. She even went so far as to believe that Jacintha was in his interest; and the poor old woman was immediately set down as no better than a procuress. While she applauded herself for having penetrated into this plot against her lady's honour, she resolved in secret to render it fruitless.

"So then," said she to the abbot with a look half satirical and half indignant—"so then you mean to stay here to-night? Do so, in God's name! Nobody will prevent you. Sit up to watch for the ghost's arrival: I shall sit up too, and the Lord grant that I may see nothing worse than a ghost! I quit not

Donna Antonia's bedside during this blessed night. Let me see any one dare to enter the room, and be he mortal or immortal, be he ghost, devil, or man, I warrant his repenting that ever he crossed the threshold!"

This hint was sufficiently strong, and Ambrosio understood its meaning. But instead of shewing that he perceived her suspicions, he replied mildly, that he approved the duenna's precautions, and advised her to persevere in her intention. This she assured him faithfully that he might depend upon her doing. Jacintha then conducted him into the chamber where the ghost had appeared, and Flora returned to her lady's.

Jacintha opened the door of the haunted room with a trembling hand; she ventured to peep in, but the wealth of India would not have tempted her to cross the threshold. She gave the taper to the monk, wished him well through the adventure, and hastened to be gone. Ambrosio entered. He bolted the door, placed the light upon the table, and seated himself in the chair which on the former night had sustained Antonia. In spite of Matilda's assurances, that the spectre was a mere creation of fancy, his mind was impressed with a certain mysterious horror. He in vain endeavoured to shake it off. The silence of the night, the story of the apparition, the chamber wain-

scoted with dark oak panels, the recollection which it brought with it of the murdered Elvira, and his incertitude respecting the nature of the drops given by him to Antonia, made him feel uneasy at his present situation. But he thought much less of the spectre than of the poison. Should he have destroyed the only object which rendered life dear to him; should the ghost's prediction prove true; should Antonia in three days be no more, and he the wretched cause of her death..... The supposition was too horrible to dwell upon. He drove away these dreadful images, and as often they presented themselves again before him. Matilda had assured him that the effects of the opiate would be speedy. He listened with fear, yet with eagerness, expecting to hear some disturbance in the adjoining chamber. All was still silent. He concluded that the drops had not begun to operate. Great was the stake for which he now played: a moment would suffice to decide upon his misery or happiness. Matilda had taught him the means of ascertaining, that life was not extinct for ever: upon this essay depended all his hopes. With every instant his impatience redoubled; his terrors grew more lively, his anxiety more awake. Unable to bear this state of incertitude, he endeavoured to divert it by substituting the thoughts of others to his own. The books, as was before mentioned, were ranged upon

shelves near the table: this stood exactly opposite to the bed, which was placed in an alcove near the closet-door. Ambrosio took down a volume, and seated himself by the table: but his attention wandered from the pages before him. Antonia's image, and that of the murdered Elvira, persisted to force themselves before his imagination. Still he continued to read, though his eyes ran over the characters without his mind being conscious of their import.

Such was his occupation when he fancied that he heard a footstep. He turned his head, but nobody was to be seen. He resumed his book; but in a few minutes after, the same sound was repeated, and followed by a rustling noise close behind him. He now started from his seat, and, looking round him, perceived the closet-door standing half unclosed. On his first entering the room, he had tried to open it, but found it bolted on the inside.

"How is this?" said he to himself; "How comes this door unfastened?"

He advanced towards it, he pushed it open, and looked into the closet: no one was there. While he stood irresolute, he thought that he distinguished a groaning in the adjacent chamber: it was Antonia's, and he supposed that the drops began to take effect. But upon listening more attentively, he found the noise to be caused by Jacintha, who had fallen asleep by the

lady's bedside, and was snoring most lustily. Ambrosio drew back, and returned to the other room, musing upon the sudden opening of the closet door, for which he strove in vain to account.

He paced the chamber up and down in silence. At length he stopped, and the bed attracted his attention. The curtain of the recess was but half drawn. He sighed involuntarily.

"That bed," said he in a low voice, "that bed was Elvira's! There has she passed many a quiet night, for she was good and innocent. How sound must have been that sleep! and yet now she sleeps sounder! Does she indeed sleep? Oh! God grant that she may! What if she rose from her grave at this sad and silent hour? What if she broke the bonds of the tomb, and glided angrily before my blasted eyes? Oh! I never could support the sight! Again to see her form distorted by dying agonies, her blood-swollen veins, her livid countenance, her eyes bursting from their sockets with pain!—to hear her speak of future punishment, menace me with heaven's vengeance, tax me with the crimes I have committed, with those I am going to commit... Great God! what is that?"

As he uttered these words, his eyes, which were fixed upon the bed, saw the curtain shaken gently backwards and forwards. The apparition was recalled to his mind, and he almost fancied that he beheld



Elvira's visionary form reclining upon the bed. A few moments consideration sufficed to reassure him.

"It was only the wind," said he, recovering himself.

Again he paced the chamber; but an involuntary movement of awe and inquietude constantly led his eye towards the alcove. He drew near it with irresolution. He paused before he ascended the few steps which led to it. He put out his hand thrice to remove the curtain, and as often drew it back.

"Absurd terrors!" he cried at length, ashamed of his own weakness.

Hastily he mounted the steps, when a figure dressed in white started from the alcove, and, gliding by him, made with precipitation towards the closet. Madness and despair now supplied the monk with that courage, of which he had till then been destitute. He flew down the steps, pursued the apparition, and attempted to grasp it.

"Ghost, or devil, I hold you!" he exclaimed, and seized the spectre by the arm.

"Oh! Christ Jesus!" cried a shrill voice; "Holy father, how you gripe me! I protest that I meant no harm!"

This address, as well as the arm which he held, convinced the abbot that the supposed ghost was substantial flesh and blood. He drew the intruder

towards the table, and, holding up the light, discovered the features of.....Madona Flora!

Incensed at having been betrayed by this trifling cause into fears so ridiculous, he asked her sternly, what business had brought her to that chamber. Flora, ashamed at being found out, and terrified at the severity of Ambrosio's looks, fell upon her knees, and promised to make a full confession.

"I protest, reverend father," said she, "that I am quite grieved at having disturbed you: nothing was further from my intention. I meant to get out of the room as quietly as I got in; and had you been ignorant that I watched you, you know it would have been the same thing as if I had not watched you at all. To be sure I did very wrong in being a spy upon you—that I cannot deny. But, Lord! your reverence, how can a poor weak woman resist curiosity? Mine was so strong to know what you were doing, that I could not but try to get a little peep without anybody knowing anything about it. So with that I left old Dame Jacintha sitting by my lady's bed, and I ventured to steal into the closet. Being unwilling to interrupt you, I contented myself at first with putting my eye to the key-hole; but as I could see nothing by this means, I undrew the bolt, and while your back was turned to the alcove, I whipt me in softly and silently. Here I lay snug behind the curtain, till your reverence found me out,

and seized me ere I had time to regain the closet door. This is the whole truth, I assure you holy father, and I beg your pardon a thousand times for my impertinence."

During this speech the abbot had time to recollect himself: he was satisfied with reading the penitent spy a lecture upon the dangers of curiosity, and the meanness of the action in which she had just been discovered. Flora declared herself fully persuaded that she had done wrong; she promised never to be guilty of the same fault again, and was retiring very humble and contrite to Antonia's chamber, when the closet door was suddenly thrown open, and in rushed Jacintha pale and out of breath.

"Oh! Father! Father!" she cried in a voice almost choked with terror, "What shall I do! What shall I do! Here is a fine piece of work! Nothing but misfortunes! Nothing but dead people, and dying people! Oh! I shall go distracted! I shall go distracted!"

"Speak! Speak!" cried Flora and the monk at the same time: "What has happened? what is the matter?"

"Oh! I shall have another corse in my house! Some witch has certainly cast a spell upon it, upon me, and upon all about me! Poor Donna Antonia! there she lies in just such convulsions as killed her

mother! The ghost told her true! I am sure the ghost told her true!"

Flora ran, or rather flew to her lady's chamber: Ambrosio followed her, his bosom trembling with hope and apprehension. They found Antonia as Jacintha had described, torn by racking convulsions, from which they in vain endeavoured to relieve her. The monk dispatched Jacintha to the abbey in all haste, and commissioned her to bring father Pablos back with her without losing a moment.

"I will go for him," replied Jacintha, "and tell him to come hither; but as to bringing him myself, I shall do no such thing. I am sure that the house is bewitched, and burn me if ever I set foot in it again."

With this resolution she set out for the monastery, and delivered to father Pablos the abbot's orders. She then betook herself to the house of old Simon Gonzalez, whom she resolved never to quit till she had made him her husband, and his dwelling her own.

Father Pablos had no sooner beheld Antonia than he pronounced her incurable. The convulsions continued for an hour; during that time her agonies were much milder than those which her groans created in the abbot's heart. Her every pang seemed a dagger in his bosom, and he cursed himself a thousand times for having adopted so barbarous a project. The hour being expired, by degrees the fits became less frequent,

and Antonia less agitated. She felt that her dissolution was approaching, and that nothing could save her.

"Worthy Ambrosio," she said in a feeble voice, while she pressed his hand to her lips; "I am now at liberty to express how grateful is my heart for your attention and kindness. I am upon the bed of death; yet an hour, and I shall be no more. I may therefore acknowledge without restraint, that to relinquish your society was very painful to me: but such was the will of a parent, and I dared not disobey. I die without repugnance: there are few who will lament my leaving them—there are few whom I lament to leave. Among those few, I lament for none more than for yourself; but we shall meet again, Ambrosio! we shall one day meet in heaven: there shall our friendship be renewed, and my mother shall view it with pleasure!"

She paused. The abbot shuddered when she mentioned Elvira. Antonia imputed his emotion to pity and concern for her.

"You are grieved for me, father," she continued: "Ah! sigh not for my loss. I have no crimes to repent, at least none of which I am conscious; and I restore my soul without fear to Him from whom I received it. I have but few requests to make; yet let me hope that what few I have shall be granted. Let a solemn mass be said for my soul's repose, and

another for that of my beloved mother; not that I doubt her resting in her grave. I am now convinced that my reason wandered, and the falsehood of the ghost's prediction is sufficient to prove my error. But everyone has some failing: my mother may have had hers, though I knew them not: I therefore wish a mass to be celebrated for her repose, and the expense may be defrayed by the little wealth of which I am possessed. Whatever may then remain, I bequeath to my aunt Leonella. When I am dead, let the marquis de las Cisternas know that his brother's unhappy family can no longer importune him. But disappointment makes me unjust: they tell me that he is ill, and perhaps, had it been in his power, he wished to have protected me. Tell him, then, father, only that I am dead, and that if he had any faults to me, I forgave him from my heart. This done, I have nothing more to ask for than your prayers. Promise to remember my requests, and I shall resign my life without a pang or sorrow."

Ambrosio engaged to comply with her desires, and proceeded to give her absolution. Every moment announced the approach of Antonia's fate. Her sight failed, her heart beat sluggishly, her fingers stiffened and grew cold, and at two in the morning she expired without a groan. As soon as the breath had forsaken her body, father Pablos retired, sincerely affected at

the melancholy scene. On her part, Flora gave way to the most unbridled sorrow. Far different concerns employed Ambrosio; he sought for the pulse whose throbbing, so Matilda had assured him, would prove Antonia's death but temporal. He found it—he pressed it—it palpitated beneath his hand, and his heart was filled with ecstasy. However, he carefully concealed his satisfaction at the success of his plan. He assumed a melancholy air, and, addressing himself to Flora, warned her against abandoning herself to fruitless sorrow. Her tears were too sincere to permit her listening to his counsels, and she continued to weep unceasingly. The friar withdrew, first promising to give orders himself about the funeral which, out of consideration for Jacintha as he pretended, should take place with all expedition. Plunged in grief for the loss of her beloved mistress, Flora scarcely attended to what he said. Ambrosio hastened to command the burial. He obtained permission from the prioress, that the corse should be deposited in St. Clare's sepulchre: and on the Friday morning, every proper and needful ceremony being performed, Antonia's body was committed to the tomb.

On the same day Leonella arrived at Madrid, intending to present her young husband to Elvira. Various circumstances had obliged her to defer her journey from Tuesday to Friday; and she had no

opportunity of making this alteration in her plans known to her sister. As her heart was truly affectionate, and as she had ever entertained a sincere regard for Elvira and her daughter, her surprise at hearing of their sudden and melancholy fate was fully equalled by her sorrow and disappointment. Ambrosio sent to inform her of Antonia's bequest: at her solicitation, he promised, as soon as Elvira's trifling debts were discharged, to transmit to her the remainder. This being settled, no other business detained Leonella in Madrid, and she returned to Cordova with all diligence.

CHAPTER V.

Oh! could I worship aught beneath the skies,
That earth has seen, or fancy could devise,
Thine altar, sacred Liberty, should stand,
Built by no mercenary vulgar hand,
With fragrant turf, and flowers as wild and fair,
As ever dressed a bank, or scented summer air.

COWPER.



IS whole attention bent upon bringing to justice the assassins of his sister, Lorenzo little thought how severely his interest was suffering in another quarter. As was before mentioned, he returned not to Madrid till the evening of that day on which Antonia was buried. Signifying to the Grand Inquisitor the order of the cardinal-duke (a ceremony not to be neglected when a member of the church was to be arrested publicly), communicating his design to his uncle and Don Ramirez, and assembling a troop of attendants sufficient to prevent opposition, furnished him with full occupation during the few hours preceding midnight. Consequently he

had no opportunity to enquire about his mistress, and was perfectly ignorant both of her death and her mother's.

The marquis was by no means out of danger: his delirium was gone, but had left him so much exhausted, that the physicians declined pronouncing upon the consequences likely to ensue. As for Raymond himself, he wished for nothing more earnestly than to join Agnes in the grave. Existence was hateful to him: he saw nothing in the world deserving his attention; and he hoped to hear that Agnes was revenged and himself given over in the same moment.

Followed by Raymond's ardent prayers for success, Lorenzo was at the gates of St. Clare a full hour before the time appointed by the mother St. Ursula. He was accompanied by his uncle, by Don Ramirez de Mello, and a party of chosen archers. Though in considerable numbers, their appearance created no surprise: a great crowd was already assembled before the convent doors, in order to witness the procession. It was naturally supposed, that Lorenzo and his attendants were conducted thither by the same design. The duke of Medina being recognised, the people drew back, and made way for his party to advance. Lorenzo placed himself opposite to the great gate, through which the pilgrims were to pass. Convinced that the prioress could not escape him, he waited patiently for

her appearance, which she was expected to make exactly at midnight.

The nuns were employed in religious duties established in honour of St. Clare, and to which no profane was ever admitted. The chapel windows were illuminated. As they stood on the outside, the auditors heard the full swell of the organ, accompanied by a chorus of female voices, rise upon the stillness of the night. This died away, and was succeeded by a single strain of harmony: it was the voice of her who was destined to sustain in the procession the character of St. Clare. For this office the most beautiful virgin of Madrid was always selected, and she upon whom the choice fell, esteemed it as the highest of honours. While listening to the music, whose melody distance only seemed to render sweeter, the audience was wrapped up in profound attention. Universal silence prevailed through the crowd, and every heart was filled with reverence for religion—every heart but Lorenzo's. Conscious that among those who chaunted the praises of their God so sweetly there were some who cloaked with devotion the foulest sins, their hymns inspired him with detestation at their hypocrisy. He had long observed with disapprobation and contempt the superstition which governed Madrid's inhabitants. His good sense had pointed out to him the artifices of the monks, and the gross absurdity of their miracles, wonders,

and supposititious reliques. He blushed to see his countrymen the dupes of deceptions so ridiculous, and only wished for an opportunity to free them from their monkish fetters. That opportunity, so long desired in vain, was at length presented to him. He resolved not to let it slip, but to set before the people, in glaring colours, how enormous were the abuses but too frequently practised in monasteries, and how unjustly public esteem was bestowed indiscriminately upon all who wore a religious habit. He longed for the moment destined to unmask the hypocrites, and convince his countrymen, that a sanctified exterior does not always hide a virtuous heart.

The service lasted till midnight was announced by the convent bell. That sound being heard, the music ceased: the voices died away softly, and soon after the lights disappeared from the chapel windows. Lorenzo's heart beat high, when he found the execution of his plan to be at hand. From the natural superstition of the people he had prepared himself for some resistance: but he trusted that the mother St. Ursula would bring good reasons to justify his proceeding. He had force with him to repel the first impulse of the populace, till his arguments should be heard: his only fear was, lest the domina, suspecting his design, should have spirited away the nun on whose deposition everything depended. Unless the mother St. Ursula should be

present, he could only accuse the prioress upon suspicion; and this reflection gave him some little apprehension for the success of his enterprise. The tranquility which seemed to reign through the convent, in some degree re-assured him: still he expected the moment eagerly, when the presence of his ally should deprive him of the power of doubting.

The abbey of Capuchins was only separated from the convent by the garden and cemetery. The monks had been invited to assist at the pilgrimage. They now arrived, marching two by two with lighted torches in their hands, and chaunting hymns in honour of St. Clare. Father Pablos was at their head, the abbot having excused himself from attending. The people made way for the holy train, and the friars placed themselves in ranks on either side of the great gates. A few minutes sufficed to arrange the order of the procession. This being settled, the convent doors were thrown open, and again the female chorus sounded in full melody. First appeared a band of choristers. As soon as they had passed, the monks fell in two by two, and followed with steps slow and measured: next came the novices: they bore no tapers, as did the professed, but moved on with eyes bent downwards, and seemed to be occupied by telling their beads. To them succeeded a young and lovely girl, who represented St. Lucia: she held a golden basin, in

which were two eyes: her own were covered by a velvet bandage, and she was conducted by another nun, habited as an angel. She was followed by St. Catherine, a palm-branch in one hand, a flaming sword in the other: she was robed in white, and her brow was ornamented with a sparkling diadem. After her appeared St. Genevieve, surrounded by a number of imps, who, putting themselves into grotesque attitudes, drawing her by the robe, and sporting round her with antic gestures, endeavoured to distract her attention from the book, on which her eyes were constantly fixed. These merry devils greatly entertained the spectators, who testified their pleasure by repeated bursts of laughter. The prioress had been careful to select a nun whose disposition was naturally solemn and saturnine. She had every reason to be satisfied with her choice: the drolleries of the imps were entirely thrown away, and St. Genevieve moved on without discomposing a muscle.

Each of these saints was separated from the other by a band of choristers, exalting her praise in their hymns, but declaring her to be very much inferior to St. Clare, the convent's avowed patroness. These having passed, a long train of nuns appeared, bearing, like the choristers, each a burning taper. Next came the reliques of St. Clare, inclosed in vases equally precious for their materials and workmanship: but

they attracted not Lorenzo's attention. The nun who bore the heart occupied him entirely. According to Theodore's description, he doubted not her being the mother St. Ursula. She seemed to look round with anxiety. As he stood foremost in the rank by which the procession passed, her eye caught Lorenzo's. A flush of joy overspread her till then pallid cheek. She turned to her companion eagerly.

"We are safe," he heard her whisper, "'tis her brother."

His heart being now at ease, Lorenzo gazed with tranquility upon the remainder of the show. Now appeared its most brilliant ornament: it was a machine fashioned like a throne, rich with jewels, and dazzling with light. It rolled onwards upon concealed wheels, and was guided by several lovely children dressed as seraphs. The summit was covered with silver clouds, upon which reclined the most beautiful form that eyes ever witnessed. It was a damsel representing St. Clare: her dress was of inestimable price, and round her head a wreath of diamonds formed an artificial glory: but all these ornaments yielded to the lustre of her charms. As she advanced, a murmur of delight ran through the crowd. Even Lorenzo confessed secretly, that he never beheld more perfect beauty; and had not his heart been Antonia's, it must have fallen a sacrifice to this enchanting girl. As it

was, he considered her only as a fine statue: she obtained from him no tribute save cold admiration; and when she had passed him, he thought of her no more.

“Who is she?” asked a bystander, in Lorenzo’s hearing.

“One whose beauty you must often have heard celebrated. Her name is Virginia de Villa-Franca: she is a pensioner of St. Clare’s convent, a relation of the prioress, and has been selected with justice as the ornament of the procession.”

The throne moved onwards. It was followed by the prioress herself: she marched at the head of the remaining nuns with a devout and sanctified air, and closed the procession. She moved on slowly: her eyes were raised to heaven: her countenance, calm and tranquil, seemed abstracted from all sublunary things, and no feature betrayed her secret pride at displaying the pomp and opulence of her convent. She passed along, accompanied by the prayers and benedictions of the populace: but how great was the general confusion and surprise when Don Ramirez, starting forward, challenged her as his prisoner!

For a moment amazement held the domina silent and immovable: but no sooner did she recover herself, than she exclaimed against sacrilege and impiety, and called upon the people to rescue a daughter of the

church. They were eagerly preparing to obey her; when Don Ramirez, protected by the archers from their rage, commanded them to forbear, and threatened them with the severest vengeance of the Inquisition. At that dreaded word every arm fell, every sword shrunk back into its scabbard. The prioress herself turned pale, and trembled. The general silence convinced her that she had nothing to hope but from innocence, and she besought Don Ramirez, in a faltering voice, to inform her of what crime she was accused.

"That you shall know in time," replied he; "but first I must secure the mother St. Ursula."

"The mother St. Ursula?" repeated the domina faintly.

At this moment casting her eyes round, she saw Lorenzo and the duke, who had followed Don Ramirez.

"Ah! great God!" she cried, clasping her hands together with a frantic air, "I am betrayed."

"Betrayed?" replied St. Ursula, who now arrived conducted by some of the archers, and followed by the nun her companion in the procession: "not betrayed, but discovered. In me recognise your accuser: you know not how well I am instructed in your guilt:—Segnor," she continued, turning to Don Ramirez, "I commit myself to your custody. I charge the prioress of St. Clare with murder, and stake my life for the justice of my accusation."

A general cry of surprise was uttered by the whole audience, and an explanation was loudly demanded. The trembling nuns, terrified at the noise and universal confusion, had dispersed, and fled different ways. Some regained the convent: others sought refuge in the dwellings of their relations; and many, only sensible of their present danger, and anxious to escape from the tumult, ran through the streets, and wandered they knew not whither. The lovely Virginia was one of the first to fly. And in order that she might better be seen and heard, the people desired that St. Ursula should harangue them from the vacant throne. The nun complied: she ascended the glittering machine, and then addressed the surrounding multitude as follows:

“ However strange and unseemly may appear my conduct, when considered to be adopted by a female and a nun, necessity will justify it most fully. A secret, an horrible secret weighs heavy upon my soul: no rest can be mine till I have revealed it to the world, and satisfied that innocent blood which calls from the grave for vengeance. Much have I dared, to gain this opportunity of lightening my conscience. Had I failed in my attempt to reveal the crime, had the domina but suspected that the mystery was known to me, my ruin was inevitable. Angels who watch unceasingly over those who deserve their favour, have enabled me to escape detection. I am now at liberty

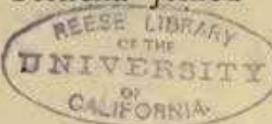
to relate a tale, whose circumstances will freeze every honest soul with horror. Mine is the task to rend the veil from hypocrisy, and shew misguided parents to what dangers the woman is exposed, who falls under the sway of a monastic tyrant.

"Among the votaries of St. Clare, none was more lovely, none more gentle, than Agnes de Medina. I knew her well: she entrusted to me every secret of her heart: I was her friend and confidante, and I loved her with sincere affection. Nor was I singular in my attachment. Her piety unfeigned, her willingness to oblige, and her angelic disposition, rendered her the darling of all that was estimable in the convent. The prioress herself, proud, scrupulous and forbidding, could not refuse Agnes that tribute of approbation which she bestowed upon no one else. Everyone has some fault. Alas! Agnes had her weakness; she violated the laws of our order, and incurred the inveterate hate of the unforgiving domina. St. Clare's rules are severe: but grown antiquated and neglected, many of late years have either been forgotten, or changed by universal consent into milder punishments. The penance adjudged to the crime of Agnes was most cruel, most inhuman. The law had been long exploded. Alas! it still existed, and the revengeful prioress now determined to revive it. This law decreed, that the offender should be plunged into a private dungeon, expressly constituted to hide

from the world for ever the victim of cruelty and tyrannic superstition. In this dreadful abode she was to lead a perpetual solitude, deprived of all society, and believed to be dead by those whom affection might have prompted to attempt her rescue. Thus was she to languish out the remainder of her days, with no other food than bread and water, and no other comfort than the free indulgence of her tears."

The indignation created by this account was so violent, as for some moments to interrupt St. Ursula's narrative. When the disturbance ceased, and silence again prevailed throughout the assembly, she continued her discourse, while at every word the domina's countenance betrayed her increasing terrors.

"A council of the twelve elder nuns was called: I was of the number. The prioress in exaggerated colours described the offence of Agnes, and scrupled not to propose the revival of this almost forgotten law. To the shame of our sex be it spoken, that either so absolute was the domina's will in the convent, or so much had disappointment, solitude, and self-denial hardened their hearts and soured their tempers, this barbarous proposal was assented to by nine voices out of the twelve. I was not one of the nine. Frequent opportunities had convinced me of the virtues of Agnes, and I loved and pitied her most sincerely. The mothers Bertha and Cornelia joined



my party: we made the strongest opposition possible, and the superior found herself compelled to change her intention. In spite of the majority in her favour, she feared to break with us openly. She knew that, supported by the Medina family, our forces would be too strong for her to cope with: and she also knew that, after being once imprisoned and supposed dead, should Agnes be discovered, her ruin would be inevitable; she therefore gave up her design, though with much reluctance. She demanded some days to reflect upon a mode of punishment, which might be agreeable to the whole community: and she promised, that as soon as her resolution was fixed, the same council should be again summoned. Two days passed away: on the evening of the third it was announced, that on the next day Agnes should be examined: and that according to her behaviour on that occasion her punishment should be either strengthened or mitigated.

“On the night preceding this examination, I stole to the cell of Agnes at an hour when I supposed the other nuns to be buried in sleep. I comforted her to the best of my power: I bade her take courage, told her to rely upon the support of her friends, and taught her certain signs, by which I might instruct her to answer the domina’s questions by an assent or negative. Conscious that her enemy would strive to confuse, embarrass, and daunt her, I feared her being ensnared

into some confession prejudicial to her interests. Being anxious to keep my visit secret, I stayed with Agnes but a short time. I bade her not to let her spirits be cast down. I mingled my tears with those which streamed down her cheek, embraced her fondly, and was on the point of retiring, when I heard the sound of steps approaching the cell. I started back. A curtain which veiled a large crucifix offered me a retreat, and I hastened to place myself behind it. The door opened. The prioress entered, followed by four other nuns. They advanced towards the bed of Agnes. The superior reproached her with her errors in the bitterest terms. She told her, that she was a disgrace to the convent, that she was resolved to deliver the world and herself from such a monster, and commanded her to drink the contents of a goblet now presented to her by one of the nuns. Aware of the fatal properties of the liquor, and trembling to find herself upon the brink of eternity, the unhappy girl strove to excite the domina's pity by the most affecting prayers. She sued for life in terms which might have melted the heart of a fiend. She promised to submit patiently to any punishment, to shame, imprisonment, and torture, might she but be permitted to live! Oh! might she but live another month, or week, or day! Her merciless enemy listened to her complaints unmoved: she told her, that at first she meant to have spared her life, and that if she

had altered her intention, she had to thank the opposition of her friends. She continued to insist upon her swallowing the poison: she bade her recommend herself to the Almighty's mercy, not to hers; and assured her that in an hour she would be numbered with the dead. Perceiving that it was vain to implore this unfeeling woman, she attempted to spring from her bed, and call for assistance: she hoped, if she could not escape the fate announced to her, at least to have witnesses of the violence committed. The prioress guessed her design: she seized her forcibly by the arm, and pushed her back upon her pillow; at the same time drawing a dagger, and placing it at the breast of the unfortunate Agnes, she protested that if she uttered a single cry, or hesitated a single moment to drink the poison, she would pierce her heart that instant. Already half-dead with fear, she could make no further resistance. The nun approached with the fatal goblet; the domina obliged her to take it, and swallow the contents. She drank; and the horrid deed was accomplished. The nuns then seated themselves round the bed; they answered her groans with reproaches; they interrupted with sarcasms the prayers in which she recommended her parting soul to mercy: they threatened her with heaven's vengeance and eternal perdition: they bade her despair of pardon, and strowed with yet sharper thorns death's painful pillow. Such were the sufferings of this

young unfortunate, till released by fate from the malice of her tormentors. She expired in horror of the past, in fears for the future; and her agonies were such as must have amply gratified the hate and vengeance of her enemies. As soon as her victim ceased to breathe, the domina retired, and was followed by her accomplices.

"It was now that I ventured from my concealment. I dared not to assist my unhappy friend, aware that, without preserving her, I should only have brought on myself the same destruction. Shocked and terrified beyond expression at this horrid scene, scarcely had I sufficient strength to regain my cell. As I reached the door of that of Agnes, I ventured to look towards the bed on which lay her lifeless body, once so lovely and so sweet! I breathed a prayer for her departed spirit, and vowed to revenge her death by the shame and punishment of her assassins. With danger and difficulty I have kept my oath. I unwarily dropped some words at the funeral of Agnes, while thrown off my guard by excessive grief, which alarm the guilty conscience of the prioress. My every action was observed; my every step was traced. I was constantly surrounded by the superior's spies. It was long before I could find the means of conveying to the unhappy girl's relations an intimation of my secret. It was given out, that Agnes had expired suddenly: this account was credited not only by her friends in Madrid, but

even by those within the convent. The poison had left no marks upon her body: no one suspected the true cause of her death, and it remained unknown to all, save the assassins and myself.

"I have no more to say; for what I have already said, I will answer with my life. I repeat, that the prioress is a murderer; that she has driven from the world, perhaps from heaven, an unfortunate whose offence was light and venial; that she has abused the power entrusted to her hands, and has been a tyrant, a barbarian, and an hypocrite. I also accuse the four nuns, Violante, Camilla, Alix and Mariana, as being her accomplices, and equally criminal."

Here St. Ursula ended her narrative. It created horror and surprise throughout; but when she related the inhuman murder of Agnes, the indignation of the mob was so audibly testified, that it was scarcely possible to hear the conclusion. This confusion increased with every moment. At length a multitude of voices exclaimed, that the prioress should be given up to their fury. To this Don Ramirez positively refused to consent. Even Lorenzo bade the people remember, that she had undergone no trial, and advised them to leave her punishment to the Inquisition. All representations were fruitless: the disturbance grew still more violent, and the populace more exasperated. In vain did Ramirez attempt to convey his prisoner

out of the throng. Wherever he turned, a band of rioters barred his passage, and demanded her being delivered over to them more loudly than before. Ramirez ordered his attendants to cut their way through the multitude. Oppressed by numbers, it was impossible for them to draw their swords. He threatened the mob with the vengeance of the Inquisition: but, in this moment of popular frenzy, even this dreadful name had lost its effect. Though regret for his sister made him look upon the prioress with abhorrence, Lorenzo could not help pitying a woman in a situation so terrible: but in spite of all his exertions and those of the duke, of Don Ramirez and the archers, the people continued to press onwards. They forced a passage through the guards who protected their destined victim, dragged her from her shelter, and proceeded to take upon her a most summary and cruel vengeance. Wild with terror, and scarcely knowing what she said, the wretched woman shrieked for a moment's mercy: she protested that she was innocent of the death of Agnes, and could clear herself from the suspicion beyond the power of doubt. The rioters heeded nothing but the gratification of their barbarous vengeance. They refused to listen to her: they shewed her every sort of insult, loaded her with mud and filth, and called her by the most opprobrious appellations. They tore her one from another, and each new tormentor was

more savage than the former. They stifled with howls and execrations her shrill cries for mercy, and dragged her through the streets, spurning her, trampling her, and treating her with every species of cruelty which hate or vindictive fury could invent. At length a flint, aimed by some well-directing hand, struck her full upon the temple. She sank upon the ground bathed in blood, and in a few minutes terminated her miserable existence. Yet though she no longer felt their insults, the rioters still exercised their impotent rage upon her lifeless body. They beat it, trod upon it, and ill-used it, till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting.

Unable to prevent this shocking event, Lorenzo and his friends had beheld it with the utmost horror: but they were roused from their compelled inactivity, on hearing that the mob were attacking the convent of St. Clare. The incensed populace, confounding the innocent with the guilty, had resolved to sacrifice all the nuns of that order to their rage, and not to leave one stone of the building upon another. Alarmed at this intelligence, they hastened to the convent, resolved to defend it if possible, or at least to rescue the inhabitants from the fury of the rioters. Most of the nuns had fled, but a few still remained in their habitation. Their situation was truly dangerous. However, as they had taken the precaution of fastening

the inner gates, with this assistance Lorenzo hoped to repel the mob, till Don Ramirez should return to him with a more sufficient force.

Having been conducted by the former disturbance to the distance of some streets from the convent, he did not immediately reach it. When he arrived, the throng surrounding it was so excessive, as to prevent his approaching the gates. In the interim, the populace besieged the building with persevering rage: they battered the walls, threw lighted torches in at the windows, and swore that by break of day not a nun of St. Clare's order should be left alive. Lorenzo had just succeeded in piercing his way through the crowd, when one of the gates was forced open. The rioters poured into the interior part of the building, where they exercised their vengeance upon everything which found itself in their passage. They broke the furniture into pieces, tore down the pictures, destroyed the reliques, and in their hatred of her servant forgot all respect to the saint. Some employed themselves in searching out the nuns, others in pulling down parts of the convent, and others again in setting fire to the pictures and valuable furniture which it contained. These latter produced the most decisive desolation. Indeed the consequences of their action were more sudden than themselves had expected or wished. The flames rising from the burning piles caught part of the

building, which being old and dry, the conflagration spread with rapidity from room to room. The walls were soon shaken by the devouring element. The columns gave way, the roofs came tumbling down upon the rioters, and crushed many of them beneath their weight. Nothing was to be heard but shrieks and groans. The convent was wrapped in flames, and the whole presented a scene of devastation and horror.

Lorenzo was shocked at having been the cause, however innocent, of this frightful disturbance: he endeavoured to repair his fault by protecting the helpless inhabitants of the convent. He entered it with the mob, and exerted himself to repress the prevailing fury, till the sudden and alarming progress of the flames compelled him to provide for his own safety. The people now hurried out as eagerly as they had before thronged in; but their numbers clogging up the door way, and the fire gaining upon them rapidly, many of them perished ere they had time to effect their escape. Lorenzo's good fortune directed him to a small door in a farther aisle of the chapel. The bolt was already undrawn: he opened the door, and found himself at the foot of St. Clare's sepulchre.

Here he stopped to breathe. The duke and some of his attendants had followed him, and thus were in security for the present. They now consulted what steps they should take to escape from this scene of

disturbance; but their deliberations were considerably interrupted by the sight of volumes of fire rising from amidst the convent's massy walls, by the noise of some heavy arch tumbling down in ruins, or by the mingled shrieks of the nuns and rioters, either suffocating in the press, perishing in the flames, or crushed beneath the weight of the falling mansion.

Lorenzo enquired, whither the wicket led? He was answered, to the garden of the Capuchins; and it was resolved to explore an outlet upon that side. Accordingly the duke raised the latch, and passed into the adjoining cemetery. The attendants followed without ceremony. Lorenzo, being the last, was also on the point of quitting the colonnade, when he saw the door of the sepulchre opened softly. Some one looked out, but on perceiving strangers uttered a loud shriek, started back again, and flew down the marble stairs.

"What can this mean?" cried Lorenzo: "Here is some mystery concealed. Follow me without delay!"

Thus saying, he hastened into the sepulchre, and pursued the person who continued to fly before him. The duke knew not the cause of this exclamation, but, supposing that he had good reasons for it, followed him without hesitation. The others did the same and the whole party soon arrived at the foot of the stairs. The upper door having been left open, the neigh-

bouring flames darted from above a sufficient light to enable Lorenzo's catching a glance of the fugitive running through the long passages and distant vaults; but when a sudden turn deprived him of this assistance total darkness succeeded, and he could only trace the object of his enquiry by the faint echo of retiring feet. The pursuers were now compelled to proceed with caution: as well as they could judge, the fugitive also seemed to slacken pace, for they heard the steps follow each other at longer intervals. They at length were bewildered by the labyrinth of passages, and dispersed in various directions. Carried away by his eagerness to clear up this mystery, and to penetrate into which he was impelled by a movement secret and unaccountable, Lorenzo heeded not this circumstance till he found himself in total solitude. The noise of footsteps had ceased, all was silent around, and no clue offered itself to guide him to the flying person. He stopped to reflect on the means most likely to aid his pursuit. He was persuaded that no common cause would have induced the fugitive to seek that dreary place at an hour so unusual: the cry which he had heard, seemed uttered in a voice of terror; and he was convinced that some mystery was attached to this event. After some minutes passed in hesitation, he continued to proceed, feeling his way along the walls of the passage. He had already passed some time in this slow progress,

when he descried a spark of light glimmering at a distance. Guided by this observation, and having drawn his sword, he bent his steps towards the place whence the beam seemed to be emitted.

It proceeded from the lamp which flamed before St. Clare's statue. Before it stood several females, their white garments streaming in the blast as it howled along the vaulted dungeons. Curious to know what had brought them together in this melancholy spot, Lorenzo drew near with precaution. The strangers seemed earnestly engaged in conversation. They heard not Lorenzo's steps, and he approached unobserved, till he could hear their voices distinctly.

"I protest," continued she who was speaking when he arrived, and to whom the rest were listening with great attention: "I protest that I saw them with my own eyes. I flew down the steps, they pursued me, and I escaped falling into their hands with difficulty. Had it not been for the lamp, I should never have found you."

"And what could bring them hither?" said another in a trembling voice; "do you think that they were looking for us?"

"God grant that my fears may be false," rejoined the first: "but I doubt they are murderers! If they discover us we are lost! As for me my fate is certain. My affinity to the prioress will be a sufficient crime

to condemn me; and though till now these vaults have afforded me a retreat"

Here looking up, her eye fell upon Lorenzo, who had continued to approach slowly.

"The murderers!" she cried.

She started away from the statue's pedestal on which she had been seated, and attempted to escape by flight. Her companions at the same moment uttered a terrified scream, while Lorenzo arrested the fugitive by the arm. Frightened and desperate, she sank upon her knees before him.

"Spare me!" she exclaimed; "for Christ's sake, spare me? I am innocent, indeed I am!"

While she spoke, her voice was almost choked with fear. The beams of the lamp darting full upon her face, which was unveiled, Lorenzo recognized the beautiful Virginia de Villa-Franca. He hastened to raise her from the ground, and besought her to take courage. He promised to protect her from the rioters, assured her that her retreat was still a secret, and that she might depend upon his readiness to defend her to the last drop of his blood. During this conversation, the nuns had thrown themselves into various attitudes: one knelt, and addressed herself to heaven; another hid her face in the lap of her neighbour; some listened motionless with fear to the discourse of the supposed assassin; while others embraced the statue of St. Clare,

and implored her protection with frantic cries. On perceiving their mistake, they crowded round Lorenzo, and heaped benedictions on him by dozens. He found that on hearing the threats of the mob, and terrified by the cruelties which from the convent towers they had seen inflicted on the superior, many of the pensioners and nuns had taken refuge in the sepulchre. Among the former was to be reckoned the lovely Virginia: nearly related to the prioress, she had more reason than the rest to dread the rioters, and now besought Lorenzo earnestly not to abandon her to their rage. Her companions, most of whom were women of noble family, made the same request, which he readily granted: he promised not to quit them till he had seen each of them safe in the arms of her relations. But he advised their deferring to quit the sepulchre for some time longer, when the popular fury should be somewhat calmed, and the arrival of military force have dispersed the multitude.

“Would to God,” cried Virginia, “that I were already safe in my mother’s embraces! How say you, Segnor? will it be long ere we may leave this place? Every moment that I pass here, I pass in torture!”

“I hope, not long,” said he; “but till you can proceed with security, this sepulchre will prove an impenetrable asylum. Here you run no risk of a

discovery, and I would advise your remaining quiet for the next two or three hours."

"Two or three hours?" exclaimed sister Helena: "If I stay another hour in these vaults, I shall expire with fear! Not the wealth of worlds should bribe me to undergo again what I have suffered since my coming hither. Blessed Virgin! To be in this melancholy place in the middle of night, surrounded by the mouldering bodies of my deceased companions, and expecting every moment to be torn in pieces by their ghosts who wander about me, and complain, and groan, and wail in accents that make my blood run cold..... Christ Jesus! It is enough to drive me to madness!"

"Excuse me," replied Lorenzo, "if I am surprised, that while menaced by real woes you are capable of yielding to imaginary dangers. These terrors are puerile and groundless: combat them, holy sister; I have promised to guard you from the rioters, but against the attacks of superstition you must depend for protection upon yourself. The idea of ghosts is ridiculous in the extreme; and if you continue to be swayed by ideal terrors....."

"Ideal?" exclaimed the nuns with one voice: "Why, we heard it ourselves, Segnor! Every one of us heard it! It was frequently repeated, and it sounded every time more melancholy and deep. You

will never persuade me that we could all have been deceived. Not we, indeed; no, no; had the noise been merely created by fancy.....”

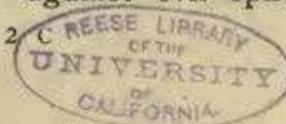
“Hark! hark!” interrupted Virginia, in a voice of terror; “God preserve us! There it is again!”

The nuns clasped their hands together, and sank upon their knees. Lorenzo looked round him eagerly, and was on the point of yielding to the fears which already had possessed the women. Universal silence prevailed. He examined the vaults, but nothing was to be seen. He now prepared to address the nuns, and ridicule their childish apprehensions, when his attention was arrested by a deep and long-drawn groan.

“What was that?” he cried, and started.—

“There, Segnor!” said Helena: “Now you must be convinced! You have heard the noise yourself! Now judge whether our terrors are imaginary. Since we have been here, that groaning has been repeated almost every five minutes. Doubtless it proceeds from some soul in pain who wishes to be prayed out of purgatory: but none of us dare ask it the question. As for me, were I to see an apparition, the fright, I am very certain, would kill me out of hand.”

As she said this, a second groan was heard yet more distinctly. The nuns crossed themselves, and hastened to repeat their prayers against evil spirits.



Lorenzo listened attentively. He even thought that he could distinguish sounds as of one speaking in complaint, but distance rendered them inarticulate. The noise seemed to come from the midst of the small vault in which he and the nuns then were, and which a multitude of passages branching out in various directions formed into a sort of star. Lorenzo's curiosity, which was ever awake, made him anxious to solve this mystery. He desired that silence might be kept. The nuns obeyed him. All was hushed till the general stillness was again disturbed by the groaning, which was repeated several times successively. He perceived it to be most audible, when upon following the sound he was conducted close to the shrine of St. Clare.

"The noise comes from hence," said he: "Whose is this statue?"

Helena, to whom he addressed the question, paused for a moment. Suddenly she clasped her hands together.

"Aye!" cried she, "it must be so. I have discovered the meaning of these groans."

The nuns crowded round her, and besought her eagerly to explain herself. She gravely replied, that for time immemorial the statue had been famous for performing miracles. From this she inferred, that the saint was concerned at the conflagration of a convent

which she protected, and expressed her grief by audible lamentations. Not having equal faith in the miraculous saint, Lorenzo did not think this solution of the mystery quite so satisfactory, as the nuns, who subscribed to it without hesitation. In one point 'tis true that he agreed with Helena. He suspected that the groans proceeded from the statue: the more he listened the more was he confirmed in this idea. He drew nearer to the image, designing to inspect it more closely: but perceiving his intention, the nuns besought him for God's sake to desist, since, if he touched the statue, his death was inevitable.

"And in what consists the danger?" said he.

"Mother of God! In what?" replied Helena, ever eager to relate a miraculous adventure: "If you had only heard the hundredth part of those marvellous stories about this statue, which the domina used to recount! She assured us often and often, that if we only dared to lay a finger upon it, we might expect the most fatal consequences. Among other things she told us, that a robber having entered these vaults by night, he observed yonder ruby, whose value is inestimable. Do you see it, Segnor? It sparkles upon this third finger of the hand in which she holds a crown of thorns. This jewel naturally excited the villain's cupidity. He resolved to make himself master of it. For this purpose he ascended the pedestal; he

supported himself by grasping the saint's right arm, and extended his own towards the ring. What was his surprise, when he saw the statue's hand raised in a posture of menace, and heard her lips pronounce his eternal perdition! Penetrated with awe and consternation, he desisted from his attempt, and prepared to quit the sepulchre. In this he also failed. Flight was denied him. He found it impossible to disengage the hand which rested upon the right arm of the statue. In vain did he struggle: he remained fixed to the image, till the insupportable and fiery anguish which darted itself through his veins, compelled his shrieking for assistance. The sepulchre was now filled with spectators. The villain confessed his sacrilege, and was only released by the separation of his hand from his body. It has remained ever since fastened to the image. The robber turned hermit, and lived ever after an exemplary life. But yet the saint's decree was performed; and tradition says, that he continues to haunt this sepulchre, and implore St. Clare's pardon with groans and lamentations. Now I think of it, those which we have just heard, may very possibly have been uttered by the ghost of this sinner: but of this I will not be positive. All that I can say is, that since that time no one has ever dared to touch the statue. Then do not be foolhardy, good Segnor? For the love of heaven, give up your

design, nor expose yourself unnecessarily to certain destruction."

Not being convinced that his destruction would be so certain as Helena seemed to think it, Lorenzo persisted in his resolution. The nuns besought him to desist, in piteous terms, and even pointed out the robber's hand, which was in effect still visible upon the arm of the statue. He sprang over the iron rails which defended it, and the saint underwent a thorough examination. The image at first appeared to be of stone, but proved on further inspection to be formed of no more solid materials than coloured wood. He shook it, and attempted to move it: but it appeared to be of a piece with the base which it stood upon. He examined it over and over: still no clue guided him to the solution of this mystery, for which the nuns were become equally solicitous, when they saw that he touched the statue with impunity. He paused and listened: the groans were repeated at intervals, and he was convinced of being in the spot nearest to them. He mused upon this singular event, and ran over the statue with enquiring eyes. Suddenly they rested upon the shrivelled hand. It struck him that so particular an injunction was not given without cause, not to touch the arm of the image. He again ascended the pedestal: he examined the object of his attention, and discovered a small knob of iron con-

cealed between the saint's shoulder and what was supposed to have been the hand of the robber. This observation delighted him. He applied his fingers to the knob, and pressed it down forcibly. Immediately a rumbling noise was heard within the statue, as if a chain tightly stretched was flying back. Startled at the sound, the timid nuns started away, prepared to hasten from the vault at the first appearance of danger. All remaining quiet and still, they again gathered round Lorenzo, and beheld his proceedings with anxious curiosity.

Finding that nothing followed this discovery, he descended. As he took his hand from the saint, she trembled beneath his touch. This created new terrors in the spectators, who believed the statue to be animated. Lorenzo's ideas upon the subject were widely different. He easily comprehended, that the noise which he had heard was occasioned by his having loosened a chain which attached the image to its pedestal. He once more attempted to move it, and succeeded without much exertion. He placed it upon the ground, and then perceived the pedestal to be hollow, and covered at the opening with a heavy iron grate.

This excited such general curiosity, that the sisters forgot both their real and imaginary dangers. Lorenzo proceeded to raise the grate, in which the nuns assisted

him to the utmost of their strength. The attempt was accomplished with little difficulty. A deep abyss now presented itself before them, whose thick obscurity the eye strove in vain to pierce. The rays of the lamp were too feeble to be of much assistance. Nothing was discernible, save a flight of rough unshapen steps, which sank into the yawning gulph, and were soon lost in darkness. The groans were heard no more: but all believed them to have ascended from this cavern. As he bent over it, Lorenzo fancied that he distinguished something bright twinkling through the gloom. He gazed attentively upon the spot where it showed itself, and was convinced that he saw a small spark of light, now visible, now disappearing. He communicated this circumstance to the nuns: they also perceived the spark: but when he declared his intention to descend into the cave, they united to oppose his resolution. All their remonstrances could not prevail on him to alter it. None of them had courage to accompany him; neither could he think of depriving them of the lamp. Alone therefore, and in darkness, he prepared to pursue his design, while the nuns were contented to offer up prayers for his success and safety.

The steps were so narrow and uneven, that to descend them was like walking down the side of a precipice. The obscurity by which he was surrounded, rendered his footing insecure. He was obliged to proceed with great

caution, lest he should miss the steps, and fall into the gulph below him. This he was several times on the point of doing. However, he arrived sooner upon solid ground than he had expected. He now found, that the thick darkness and impenetrable mists which reigned through the cavern, had deceived him into the belief of its being much more profound than it proved upon inspection. He reached the foot of the stairs unhurt: he now stopped, and looked round for the spark, which had before caught his attention. He sought it in vain: all was dark and gloomy. He listened for the groans; but his ear caught no sound except the distant murmur of the nuns above, as in low voices they repeated their ave-marias. He stood irresolute to which side he should address his steps. At all events he determined to proceed: he did so, but slowly, fearful lest, instead of approaching, he should be retiring from the object of his search. The groans seemed to announce one in pain, or at least in sorrow, and he hoped to have the power of relieving the mourner's calamities. A plaintive tone, sounding at no great distance, at length reached his hearing: he bent his course joyfully towards it. It became more audible as he advanced; and he soon beheld again the spark of light, which a low projecting wall had hitherto concealed from him.

It proceeded from a small lamp which was placed upon an heap of stones, and whose faint and melancholy

rays served rather to point out than dispel the horrors of a narrow gloomy dungeon, formed in one side of the cavern: it also shewed several other recesses of similar construction, but whose depth was buried in obscurity. Coldly played the light upon the damp walls, whose dew-stained surface gave back a feeble reflection. A thick and pestilential fog clouded the height of the vaulted dungeon. As Lorenzo advanced, he felt a piercing chillness spread itself through his veins. The frequent groans still engaged him to move forwards. He turned towards them, and by the lamp's glimmering beams beheld, in a corner of this loathsome abode, a creature stretched upon a bed of straw, so wretched, so emaciated, so pale, that he doubted to think her woman. She was half naked: her long dishevelled hair fell in disorder over her face, and almost entirely concealed it. One wasted arm hung listlessly upon a tattered rug, which covered her convulsed and shivering limbs: the other was wrapped round a small bundle, and held it closely to her bosom. A large rosary lay near her: opposite to her was a crucifix, on which she bent her sunk eyes fixedly, and by her side stood a basket and a small earthen pitcher.

Lorenzo stopped: he was petrified with horror. He gazed upon the miserable object with disgust and pity. He trembled at the spectacle: he grew sick at heart: his strength failed him, and his limbs were

unable to support his weight. He was obliged to lean against the low wall which was near him, unable to go forward or to address the sufferer. She cast her eyes towards the staircase: the wall concealed Lorenzo, and she observed him not.

"No one comes!" she at length murmured.

As she spoke, her voice was hollow, and rattled in her throat: he sighed bitterly.

"No one comes!" she repeated: "no! they have forgotten me! they will come no more!"

She paused for a moment; then continued mournfully:

"Two days! two long, long days, and yet no food! and yet no hope, no comfort! Foolish woman! how can I wish to lengthen a life so wretched!—Yet such a death! O God! to perish by such a death! to linger out such ages in torture! Till now, I knew not what it was to hunger!—Hark!—No! no one comes: they will come no more."

She was silent. She shivered, and drew the rug over her naked shoulders:

"I am very cold: I am still unused to the damps of this dungeon: 'tis strange: but no matter. Colder shall I soon be, and yet not feel it. I shall be cold, cold as thou art."

She looked at the bundle which lay upon her breast. She bent over it, and kissed it: then drew back hastily, and shuddered with disgust:

"It was once so sweet! It would have been so lovely, so like him! I have lost it for ever. How a few days have changed it! I should not know it again myself. Yet it is dear to me. God! how dear!—I will forget what it is! I will only remember what it was, and love it as well, as when it was so sweet! so lovely! so like him!—I thought that I had wept away all my tears, but here is one still lingering."

She wiped her eyes with a tress of her hair. She put out her hand for the pitcher, and reached it with difficulty. She cast into it a look of hopeless enquiry. She sighed, and replaced it upon the ground.

"Quite a void!—Not a drop!—Not one drop left to cool my scorched-up burning palate!—Now would I give treasures for a draught of water!—And they are God's servants who make me suffer thus!—They think themselves holy, while they torture me like fiends!—They are cruel and unfeeling: and 'tis they who bid me repent! and 'tis they who threaten me with eternal perdition! Saviour, Saviour! you think not so!"

She again fixed her eyes upon the crucifix, took her rosary, and, while she told her beads, the quick motion of her lips declared her to be praying with fervency.

While he listened to her melancholy accents, Lorenzo's sensibility became yet more violently affected. The first sight of such misery had given a sensible shock to his feelings: but that being past, he now advanced

towards the captive. She heard his steps, and, uttering a cry of joy, dropped the rosary.

"Hark! hark! hark!" she cried, "some one comes!"

She strove to raise herself, but her strength was unequal to the attempt; she fell back, and, as she sank again upon the bed of straw, Lorenzo heard the rattling of heavy chains. He still approached, while the prisoner thus continued:

"Is it you, Camilla? You are come then at last? Oh! it was time! I thought that you had forsaken me; that I was doomed to perish of hunger. Give me to drink, Camilla, for pity's sake; I am faint with long fasting, and grown so weak that I cannot raise myself from the ground. Good Camilla, give me to drink, lest I expire before you."

Fearing that surprise in her enfeebled state might be fatal, Lorenzo was at a loss how to address her.

"It is not Camilla," said he at length, speaking in a slow and gentle voice.

"Who is it then?" replied the sufferer; "Alix, perhaps, or Violante. My eyes are grown so dim and feeble, that I cannot distinguish your features; but whichever it is, if your breast is sensible of the least compassion, if you are not more cruel than wolves, and tigers, take pity on my sufferings. You know that I am dying for want of sustenance. This is the

third day since these lips have received nourishment. Do you bring me food? or come you only to announce my death, and learn how long I have yet to exist in agony?"

"You mistake my business," replied Lorenzo; "I am no emissary of the cruel prioress. I pity your sorrows and come hither to relieve them."

"To relieve them?" repeated the captive; "said you, to relieve them?"

At the same time starting from the ground, and supporting herself upon her hands, she gazed upon the stranger earnestly.

"Great God!—Is it no illusion?—A man? Speak? Who are you? What brings you hither? Come you to save me, to restore me to liberty, to life and light? Oh! speak, speak quickly, lest I encourage an hope whose disappointment will destroy me."

"Be calm!" replied Lorenzo, in a voice soothing and compassionate; "the domina of whose cruelty you complain, has already paid the forfeit of her offences: you have nothing more to fear from her. A few minutes will restore you to liberty and the embraces of your friends, from whom you have been secluded. You may rely upon my protection. Give me your hand, and be not fearful. Let me conduct you where you may receive those attentions which your feeble state requires."

"Oh! yes! yes! yes!" cried the prisoner with an exulting shriek; "there is a God then, and a just one! Joy! Joy! I shall once more breathe the fresh air, and view the light of the glorious sunbeams! I will go with you! Stranger, I will go with you! Oh! Heaven will bless you for pitying an unfortunate! But this too must go with me," she added, pointing to the small bundle, which she still clasped to her bosom; "I cannot part with this. I will bear it away: it shall convince the world how dreadful are the abodes so falsely termed religious. Good stranger! lend me your hand to rise; I am faint with want, and sorrow, and sickness, and my strength has quite forsaken me! So, that is well!"

As Lorenzo stooped to raise her, the beams of the lamp struck full upon his face.

"Almighty God!" she exclaimed: "Is it possible? —That look! those features!—Oh! yes, it is, it is....."

She extended her arms to throw them round him, but her enfeebled frame was unable to sustain the emotions which agitated her bosom. She fainted, and again sank upon the bed of straw.

Lorenzo was surprised at her last exclamation. He thought that he had before heard such accents as her hollow voice had just formed, but where, he could not remember. He saw, that in her dangerous

situation immediate physical aid was absolutely necessary, and he hastened to convey her from the dungeon. He was at first prevented from doing so by a strong chain fastened round the prisoner's body, and fixing her to the neighbouring wall. However, his natural strength being aided by anxiety to relieve the unfortunate, he soon forced out the staple, to which one end of the chain was attached: then taking the captive in his arms, he bent his course towards the staircase. The rays of the lamp above, as well as the murmur of female voices, guided his steps. He gained the stairs, and in a few minutes after arrived at the iron grate.

The nuns during his absence had been terribly tormented by curiosity and apprehension. They were equally surprised and delighted on seeing him suddenly emerge from the cave. Every heart was filled with compassion for the miserable creature, whom he bore in his arms. While the nuns, and Virginia in particular, employed themselves in striving to recall her to her senses, Lorenzo related in few words the manner of his finding her. He then observed to them, that by this time the tumult must have been quelled, and that he could now conduct them to their friends without danger. All were eager to quit the sepulchre. Still, to prevent all possibility of ill-usage, they besought Lorenzo to venture out first alone, and examine whether the coast was clear.

With this request he complied. Helena offered to conduct him to the staircase, and they were on the point of departing, when a strong light flashed from several passages upon the adjacent walls. At the same time steps were heard of people approaching hastily, and whose number seemed to be considerable. The nuns were greatly alarmed at this circumstance; they supposed their retreat to be discovered, and the rioters to be advancing in pursuit of them. Hastily quitting the prisoner, who remained insensible, they crowded round Lorenzo, and claimed his promise to protect them. Virginia alone forgot her own danger by striving to relieve the sorrows of another. She supported the sufferer's head upon her knees, bathing her temples with rose-water, chafing her cold hands, and sprinkling her face with tears which were drawn from her by compassion. The strangers approaching nearer, Lorenzo was enabled to dispel the fears of the suppliants. His name pronounced by a number of voices, among which he distinguished the duke's, pealed along the vaults, and convinced him that he was the object of their search. He communicated this intelligence to the nuns, who received it with rapture. A few moments after confirmed his idea. Don Ramirez as well as the duke appeared, followed by attendants with torches. They had been seeking him through the vaults, in order to let him know that the mob was dispersed, and the riot entirely over.

Lorenzo recounted briefly his adventure in the cavern, and explained how much the unknown was in want of medical assistance. He besought the duke to take charge of her, as well as of the nuns and pensioners.

"As for me," said he, "other cares demand my attention. While you with one half of the archers convey these ladies to their respective homes, I wish the other half to be left with me. I will examine the cavern below, and pervade the most secret recesses of the sepulchre. I cannot rest till convinced that yonder wretched victim was the only one confined by superstition in these vaults.

The duke applauded his intention. Don Ramirez offered to assist him in his enquiry, and his proposal was accepted with gratitude. The nuns, having made their acknowledgments to Lorenzo, committed themselves to the care of his uncle, and were conducted from the sepulchre. Virginia requested that the unknown might be given to her in charge, and promised to let Lorenzo know, whenever she was sufficiently recovered to accept his visits. In truth, she made this promise more from consideration for herself, than for either Lorenzo or the captive. She had witnessed his politeness, gentleness, and intrepidity with sensible emotion. She wished earnestly to preserve his acquaintance; and in addition to the sentiments of pity which the prisoner excited, she hoped that her attention to this unfortunate would

raise her a degree in the esteem of Lorenzo. She had no occasion to trouble herself upon this head. The kindness already displayed by her, and the tender concern which she had shewn for the sufferer, had gained her an exalted place in his good graces. While occupied in alleviating the captive's sorrows, the nature of her employment adorned her with new charms, and rendered her beauty a thousand times more interesting. Lorenzo viewed her with admiration and delight: he considered her as a ministering angel descended to the aid of afflicted innocence; nor could his heart have resisted her attractions, had it not been steeled by the remembrance of Antonia.

The duke now conveyed the nuns in safety to the dwellings of their respective friends. The rescued prisoner was still insensible, and gave no signs of life, except by occasional groans. She was borne upon a sort of litter. Virginia, who was constantly by the side of it, was apprehensive that, exhausted by long abstinence, and shaken by the sudden change from bonds and darkness to liberty and light, her frame would never get the better of the shock. Lorenzo and Don Ramirez still remained in the sepulchre. After deliberating upon their proceedings, it was resolved that, to prevent losing time, the archers should be divided into two bodies: that with one Don Ramirez should examine the cavern, while Lorenzo, with the

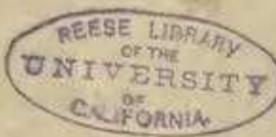
other, might penetrate into the further vaults. This being arranged, and his followers being provided with torches, Don Ramirez advanced to the cavern. He had already descended some steps, when he heard people approaching hastily from the interior part of the sepulchre. This surprised him, and he quitted the cave precipitately.

"Do you hear footsteps?" said Lorenzo. "Let us bend our course towards them. 'Tis from this side that they seem to proceed."

At that moment a loud and piercing shriek induced him to quicken his steps.

"Help! help, for God's sake!" cried a voice, whose melodious tone penetrated Lorenzo's heart with terror.

He flew towards the cry with the rapidity of lightning, and was followed by Ramirez with equal swiftness.



CHAPTER VI.

Great Heaven! How frail thy creature man is made!
 How by himself insensibly betrayed!
 In our own strength unhappily secure,
 Too little cautious of the adverse power,
 On pleasure's flowery brink we idly stray,
 Masters as yet of our returning way:
 Till the strong gusts of raging passion rise,
 Till the dire tempest mingles earth and skies,
 And, swift into the boundless ocean borne,
 Our foolish confidence too late we mourn:
 Round our devoted heads the billows beat,
 And from our troubled view the lessening lands retreat.

PRIOR.



LL this while Ambrosio was unconscious of the dreadful scenes which were passing so near. The execution of his designs upon Antonia employed his every thought. Hitherto he was satisfied with the success of his plans. Antonia had drank the opiate, was buried in the vaults of St. Clare, and absolutely in his disposal. Matilda, who was well acquainted with the nature and affects of the

soporific medicine, had computed that it would not cease to operate till one in the morning. For that hour he waited with impatience. The festival of St. Clare presented him with a favourable opportunity of consummating his crime. He was certain that the friars and nuns would be engaged in the procession, and that he had no cause to dread an interruption: from appearing himself at the head of the monks, he had desired to be excused. He doubted not, that being beyond the reach of help, cut off from all the world, and totally in his power, Antonia would comply with his desires. The affection which she had ever expressed for him, warranted this persuasion: but he resolved that should she prove obstinate, no consideration whatever should prevent him from enjoying her. Secure from a discovery, he shuddered not at the idea of employing force; or, if he felt any repugnance, it arose not from a principle of shame or compassion, but from his feeling for Antonia the most sincere and ardent affection, and wishing to owe her favours to no one but herself.

The monks quitted the abbey at midnight. Matilda was amongst the choristers, and lead the chaunt. Ambrosio was left by himself, and at liberty to pursue his own inclinations. Convinced that no one remained behind to watch his motions, or disturb his pleasures, he now hastened to the western aisles. His heart

beating with hope not unmixed with anxiety, he crossed the garden, unlocked the door which admitted him into the cemetery, and in a few minutes he stood before the vaults. Here he paused: he looked round him with suspicion, conscious that his business was unfit for any other eye. As he stood in hesitation, he heard the melancholy shriek of the screech owl: the wind rattled loudly against the windows of the adjacent convent, and, as the current swept by him, bore with it the faint notes of the chaunt of choristers. He opened the door cautiously, as if fearing to be overheard; he entered, and closed it again after him. Guided by his lamp, he threaded the long passages, in whose windings Matilda had instructed him, and reached the vault which contained his sleeping mistress.

Its entrance was by no means easy to discover; but this was no obstacle to Ambrosio, who at the time of Antonia's funeral had observed it too carefully to be deceived. He found the door, which was unfastened, pushed it open, and descended into the dungeon. He approached the humble tomb in which Antonia reposed. He had provided himself with an iron crow and a pick-axe: but this precaution was unnecessary. The grate was slightly fastened on the outside: he raised it, and, placing the lamp upon its ridge, bent silently over the tomb. By the side of three putrid half corrupted bodies lay the sleeping beauty. A lively red, the forerunner

of returning animation, had already spread itself over her cheeks; and as wrapped in her shroud she reclined upon her funeral bier, she seemed to smile at the images of death around her. While he gazed upon their rotting bones and disgusting figures, who perhaps once were as sweet and lovely, Ambrosio thought upon Elvira, by him reduced to the same state. As the memory of that horrid act glanced upon his mind, it was clouded with a gloomy horror; yet it served but to strengthen his resolution to destroy Antonia's honour.

"For your sake, fatal beauty!" murmured the monk, while gazing on his devoted prey, for your sake have I committed this murder, and sold myself to eternal tortures. Now you are in my power: the produce of my guilt will at least be mine. Hope not that your prayers, breathed in tones of unequalled melody, your bright eyes filled with tears, and your hands lifted in supplication, as when seeking in penitence the Virgin's pardon: hope not, that your moving innocence, your beauteous grief, or all your suppliant arts, shall ransom you from my embraces. Before the break of day, mine you must, and mine you shall be!"

He lifted her, still motionless, from the tomb: he seated himself upon a bank of stone, and, supporting her in his arms, watched impatiently for the symptoms of returning animation. Scarcely could he command

his passion sufficiently, to restrain himself from enjoying her while yet insensible. His natural lust was increased in ardour, by the difficulties which had opposed his satisfying it; as also by his long abstinence from woman, since, from the moment of resigning her claim to his love, Matilda had exiled him from her arms for ever.

"I am no prostitute, Ambrosio," had she told him, when, in the fulness of his lust, he demanded her favours with more than usual earnestness; "I am now no more than your friend, and will not be your mistress. Cease then to solicit my complying with desires which insult me. While your heart was mine, I glорied in your embraces. Those happy times are past: my person is become indifferent to you, and 'tis necessity, not love, which makes you seek my enjoyment. I cannot yield to a request so humiliating to my pride."

Suddenly deprived of pleasures, the use of which had made them an absolute want, the monk felt this restraint severely. Naturally addicted to the gratification of the senses, in the full vigour of manhood and heat of blood, he had suffered his temperament to acquire such ascendancy, that his lust was become madness. Of his fondness for Antonia, none but the grosser particles remained: he longed for the possession of her person; and even the gloom of the vault, the surrounding silence, and the resistance which he expected

from her, seemed to give a fresh edge to his fierce and unbridled desires.

Gradually he felt the bosom which rested against his glow with returning warmth. Her heart throbbed again, her blood flowed swifter, and her lips moved. At length she opened her eyes; but, still oppressed and bewildered by the effects of the strong opiate, she closed them again immediately. Ambrosio watched her narrowly, nor permitted a movement to escape him. Perceiving that she was fully restored to existence, he caught in rapture to his bosom, and closely pressed his lips to hers. The suddenness of his action sufficed to dissipate the fumes which obscured Antonia's reason. She hastily raised herself, and cast a wild look round her. The strange images which presented themselves on every side contributed to confuse her. She put her hand to her head, as if to settle her disordered imagination. At length she took it away, and threw her eyes through the dungeon a second time. They fixed on the abbot's face.

"Where am I?" she said abruptly. "How came I here?—Where is my mother? Methought I saw her! Oh! a dream, a dreadful dreadful dream told me..... But where am I? Let me go! I cannot stay here!"

She attempted to rise, but the monk prevented her.

"Be calm, lovely Antonia!" he replied; "no

danger is near you: confide in my protection. Why do you gaze on me so earnestly? Do you not know me? Not know your friend, Ambrosio?"

"Ambrosio? my friend?—Oh! yes, yes; I remember But why am I here? Who has brought me?—Why are you with me?—Oh! Flora bade me beware!—Here are nothing but graves, and tombs, and skeletons! This place frightens me! Good Ambrosio, take me away from it, for it recalls my fearful dream!—Methought I was dead, and laid in my grave!—Good Ambrosio, take me from hence!—Will you not? Oh! will you not?—Do not look on me thus!—Your flaming eyes terrify me!—Spare me, father! Oh! spare me for God's sake!"

"Why these terrors, Antonia?" rejoined the abbot, folding her in his arms, and covering her bosom with kisses which she in vain struggled to avoid. "What fear you from me, from one who adores you? What matters it where you are? This sepulchre seems to me Love's bower. This gloom is the friendly night of Mystery, which he spreads over our delights! Such do I think it, and such must my Antonia. Yes, my sweet girl! yes! Your veins shall glow with the fire which circles in mine, and my transports shall be doubled by your sharing them!"

While he spoke thus, he repeated his embraces, and permitted himself the most indecent liberties.

Even Antonia's ignorance was not proof against the freedom of his behaviour. She was sensible of her danger, forced herself from his arms, and her shroud being her only garment, she wrapped it closely round her.

"Unhand me father!" she cried, her honest indignation tempered by alarm at her unprotected position: "Why have you brought me to this place? Its appearance freezes me with horror! Convey me from hence, if you have the least sense of pity and humanity! Let me return to the house, which I have quitted I know not how; but stay here one moment longer, I neither will nor ought."

Though the monk was somewhat startled by the resolute tone in which this speech was delivered, it produced upon him no other effect than surprise. He caught her hand, forced her upon his knee, and, gazing upon her with gloating eyes, he thus replied to her:

"Compose yourself, Antonia. Resistance is unavailing, and I need disavow my passion for you no longer. You are imagined dead; society is for ever lost to you. I possess you here alone; you are absolutely in my power, and I burn with desires which I must either gratify or die: but I would owe my happiness to yourself. My lovely girl! my adorable Antonia! let me instruct you in joys to which you are still a stranger, and teach you to feel those pleasures in my arms, which I must soon enjoy in yours. Nay, this struggling is childish,"

he continued, seeing her repel his caresses, and endeavour to escape from his grasp; "no aid is near; neither heaven nor earth shall save you from my embraces. Yet why reject pleasures so sweet, so rapturous? No one observes us; our commerce will be a secret to all the world. Love and opportunity invite your giving loose to your passions. Yield to them, my Antonia! yield to them, my lovely girl! Throw your arms thus fondly round me; join your lips thus closely to mine! Amidst all her gifts, has Nature denied her most precious, the sensibility of pleasure? Oh! impossible! Every feature, look, and motion declares you formed to bless, and to be blessed yourself! Turn not on me those supplicating eyes: consult your own charms; they will tell you that I am proof against entreaty. Can I relinquish these limbs so white, so soft, so delicate! these swelling breasts, round, full, and elastic! these lips fraught with such inexhaustible sweetness? Can I relinquish these treasures, and leave them to another's enjoyment? No, Antonia; never, never! I swear it by this kiss! and this! and this!"

With every moment the friar's passion became more ardent, and Antonia's terror more intense. She struggled to disengage herself from his arms. Her exertions were unsuccessful; and, finding that Ambrosio's conduct became still freer, she shrieked for assistance with all her strength. The aspect of the vault, the pale

glimmering of the lamp, the surrounding obscurity, the sight of the tomb, and the objects of mortality which met her eyes on either side, were ill calculated to inspire her with those emotions by which the friar was agitated. Even his caresses terrified her from their fury, and created no other sentiment than fear. On the contrary, her alarm, her evident disgust, and incessant opposition, seemed only to inflame the monk's desires, and supply his brutality with additional strength. Antonia's shrieks were unheard; yet she continued them, nor abandoned her endeavours to escape, till exhausted and out of breath she sank from his arms upon her knees, and once more had recourse to prayers and supplications. This attempt had no better success than the former. On the contrary, taking advantage of her situation, the ravisher threw himself by her side. He clasped her to his bosom almost lifeless with terror, and faint with struggling. He stifled her cries with kisses, treated her with the rudeness of an unprincipled barbarian, proceeded from freedom to freedom, and in the violence of his lustful delirium, wounded and bruised her tender limbs. Heedless of her tears, cries, and entreaties, he gradually made himself master of her person, and desisted not from his prey, till he had accomplished his crime and the dishonour of Antonia.

Scarcely had he succeeded in his design, than he shuddered at himself, and the means by which it was

effected. The very excess of his former eagerness to possess Antonia now contributed to inspire him with disgust; and a secret impulse made him feel how base and unmanly was the crime which he had just committed. He started hastily from her arms. She who so lately had been the object of his adoration, now raised no other sentiment in his heart than aversion and rage. He turned away from her; or, if his eyes rested upon her figure involuntarily, it was only to dart upon her looks of hate. The unfortunate had fainted ere the completion of her disgrace: she only recovered life to be sensible of her misfortune. She remained stretched upon the earth in silent despair; the tears chased each other slowly down her cheeks, and her bosom heaved with frequent sobs. Oppressed with grief, she continued for some time in this state of torpidity. At length she rose with difficulty, and, dragging her feeble steps towards the door, prepared to quit the dungeon.

The sound of her footsteps roused the monk from his sullen apathy. Starting from the tomb against which he reclined, while his eyes wandered over the images of corruption contained in it, he pursued the victim of his brutality, and soon overtook her. He seized her by the arm, and violently forced her back into the dungeon.

“Whither go you?” he cried in a stern voice; “return this instant!”

Antonia trembled at the fury of his countenance.

“What would you more?” she said with timidity: “Is not my ruin completed? Am I not undone, undone for ever? Is not your cruelty contented, or have I yet more to suffer? Let me depart: let me return to my home, and weep unrestrained my shame and my affliction!”

“Return to your home?” repeated the monk, with bitter and contemptuous mockery; then suddenly his eyes flaming with passion, “What? That you may denounce me to the world? that you may proclaim me a hypocrite, a ravisher, a betrayer, a monster of cruelty, lust, and ingratitude? No, no, no! I know well the whole weight of my offences; well, that your complaints would be too just, and my crimes too notorious! You shall not from hence to tell Madrid that I am a villain; that my conscience is loaded with sins, which make me despair of heaven’s pardon. Wretched girl, you must stay here with me! Here amidst these lonely tombs, these images of death, these rotting, loathsome, corrupted bodies! here shall you stay, and witness my sufferings; witness what it is to feel the horrors of despondency, and breathe the last groan in blasphemy and curses!—And whom am I to thank for this? What seduced me into crimes, whose bare remembrance makes me shudder? Fatal witch! was it not thy beauty? Have you not plunged my soul in shame? Have you not made me a

perjured hypocrite, a ravisher, an assassin? Nay, at this moment, does not that angel look bid me despair of God's forgiveness? Oh! when I stand before his judgment throne, that look will suffice to damn me! You will tell my judge, that you were happy, till *I* saw you; that you were innocent till *I* polluted you! You will come with those tearful eyes, those cheeks pale and ghastly, those hands lifted in supplication, as when you sought from me that mercy which I gave not! Then will my perdition be certain! Then will come your mother's ghost, and hurl me down into the dwelling of fiends, and flames, and furies, and everlasting torments! And 'tis you who will accuse me! 'tis you who will cause my eternal anguish!—you, wretched girl! you! you!"

As he thundered out these words, he violently grasped Antonia's arm, and spurned the earth with delirious fury.

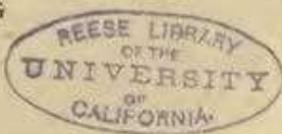
Supposing his brain to be turned, Antonia sank in terror upon her knees; she lifted up her hands, and her voice almost died away ere she could give it utterance.

"Spare me! spare me!" she murmured with difficulty.

"Silence!" cried the friar madly, and dashed her upon the ground—

He quitted her, and paced the dungeon with a wild and disordered air. His eyes rolled fearfully; Antonia trembled whenever she met their gaze. He seemed to

meditate on something horrible, and she gave up all hopes of escaping from the sepulchre with life. Yet in harbouring this idea she did him injustice. Amidst the horror and disgust to which his soul was a prey, pity for his victim still held a place in it. The storm of passion once over, he would have given worlds, had he possessed them, to have restored to her that innocence of which his unbridled lust had deprived her. Of the desires which had urged him to the crime, no trace was left in his bosom. The wealth of India would not have tempted him to a second enjoyment of her person. His nature seemed to revolt at the very idea, and fain would he have wiped from his memory the scene which had just passed. As his gloomy rage abated, in proportion did his compassion augment for Antonia. He stopped, and would have spoken to her words of comfort; but he knew not from whence to draw them, and remained gazing upon her with mournful wildness. Her situation seemed so hopeless, so woe-begone, as to baffle mortal power to relieve her. What could he do for her? Her peace of mind was lost, her honour irreparably ruined. She was cut off for ever from society, nor dared he give her back to it. He was conscious that, were she to appear in the world again, his guilt would be revealed, and his punishment inevitable. To one so laden with crimes, death came armed with double terrors. Yet, should he restore Antonia to light, and stand the chance of her betraying



him, how miserable a prospect would present itself before her! She could never hope to be creditably established; she would be marked with infamy, and condemned to sorrow and solitude for the remainder of her existence. What was the alternative! A resolution far more terrible for Antonia, but which at least would insure the abbot's safety. He determined to leave the world persuaded of her death, and to retain her a captive in this gloomy prison. There he proposed to visit her every night, to bring her food, to profess his penitence and mingle his tears with hers. The monk felt that this resolution was unjust and cruel; but it was his only means to prevent Antonia from publishing his guilt and her own infamy. Should he release her, he could not depend upon her silence. His offence was too flagrant to permit his hoping for her forgiveness. Besides, her reappearing would excite universal curiosity, and the violence of her affliction would prevent her from concealing its cause. He determined, therefore, that Antonia should remain a prisoner in the dungeon.

He approached her with confusion painted on his countenance. He raised her from the ground—her hand trembled as he took it, and he dropped it again as if he had touched a serpent. Nature seemed to recoil at the touch. He felt himself at once repulsed from and attracted towards her, yet could account for neither sentiment. There was something in her look

which penetrated him with horror; and though his understanding was still ignorant of it, conscience pointed out to him the whole extent of his crime. In hurried accents, yet the gentlest he could find, whilst his eye was averted, and his voice scarcely audible, he strove to console her under a misfortune which now could not be avoided. He declared himself sincerely penitent, and that he would gladly shed a drop of his blood for every tear which his barbarity had forced from her. Wretched and hopeless, Antonia listened to him in silent grief; but when he announced her confinement in the sepulchre, that dreadful doom, to which even death seemed preferable, roused her from her insensibility at once. To linger out a life of misery in a narrow loathsome cell, known to exist by no human being save her ravisher, surrounded by mouldering corses, breathing the pestilential air of corruption, never more to behold the light, or drink the pure gale of heaven—the idea was more terrible than she could support. It conquered even her abhorrence of the friar. Again she sank upon her knees; she besought his compassion in terms the most pathetic and urgent: she promised, would he but restore her to liberty, to conceal her injuries from the world; to assign any reasons for her re-appearance, which he might judge proper; and in order to prevent the least suspicion from falling upon him, she offered to quit Madrid immediately. Her

entreaties were so urgent as to make a considerable impression upon the monk. He reflected, that as her person no longer excited her desires, he had no interest in keeping her concealed as he had at first intended; that he was adding a fresh injury to those which she had already suffered; and that if she adhered to her promises, whether she was confined or at liberty, his life and reputation were equally secure. On the other hand, he trembled lest in her affliction Antonia should unintentionally break her engagement, or that her excessive simplicity and ignorance of deceit should permit some one more artful to surprise her secret.—However well-founded were these apprehensions, compassion, and a sincere wish to repair his fault as much as possible, solicited his complying with the prayers of his suppliant. The difficulty of colouring Antonia's unexpected return to life, after her supposed death and public interment, was the only point which kept him irresolute. He was still pondering on the means of removing this obstacle, when he heard the sound of feet approaching with precipitation. The door of the vault was thrown open, and Matilda rushed in, evidently much confused and terrified.

On seeing a stranger enter, Antonia uttered a cry of joy; but her hopes of receiving succour from him were soon dissipated. The supposed novice, without expressing the least surprise at finding a woman alone

with the monk, in so strange a place, and at so late an hour, addressed him thus without losing a moment:

"What is to be done, Ambrosio? We are lost, unless some speedy means is found of dispelling the rioters. Ambrosio, the convent of St. Clare is on fire; the prioress is fallen a victim to the fury of the mob. Already is the abbey menaced with a similar fate. Alarmed at the threats of the people, the monks seek for you everywhere. They imagine that your authority alone will suffice to calm this disturbance. No one knows what is become of you, and your absence creates universal astonishment and despair. I profited by the confusion, and fled hither to warn you of the danger."

"This will soon be remedied," answered the abbot; "I will hasten back to my cell: a trivial reason will account for my having been missed."

"Impossible!" rejoined Matilda: "The sepulchre is filled with archers. Lorenzo de Medina, with several officers of the Inquisition, searches through the vaults, and pervades every passage. You will be intercepted in your flight; your reasons for being at this late hour in the sepulchre will be examined; Antonia will be found, and then you are undone for ever?"

"Lorenzo de Medina? Officers of the Inquisition? What brings them here? Seek they for me? Am I then suspected? Oh! speak Matilda! answer me in pity!"

"As yet they do not think of you; but I fear that

they will ere long. Your only chance of escaping their notice rests upon the difficulty of exploring this vault. The door is artfully hidden; haply it may not be observed, and we may remain concealed till the search is over." "But Antonia.....Should the Inquisitors draw near, and her cries be heard....."

"Thus I remove that danger!" interrupted Matilda.

At the same time drawing a poniard, she rushed upon her devoted prey.

"Hold! hold!" cried Ambrosio, seizing her hand, and wresting from it the already lifted weapon.

"What would you do, cruel woman? The unfortunate has already suffered but too much, thanks to your pernicious counsels! Would to God that I had never followed them! Would to God that I had never seen your face!"

Matilda darted upon him a look of scorn.

"Absurd!" she exclaimed with an air of passion and majesty, which impressed the monk with awe. "After robbing her of all that made it dear, can you fear to deprive her of a life so miserable? But 'tis well! Let her live to convince you of your folly. I abandon you to your evil destiny! I disclaim your alliance! Who trembles to commit so insignificant a crime, deserves not my protection. Hark! hark! Ambrosio: hear you not the archers? They come, and your destruction is inevitable!"

At this moment the abbot heard the sound of distant voices. He flew to close the door, on whose concealment his safety depended, and which Matilda had neglected to fasten. Ere he could reach it, he saw Antonia glide suddenly by him, rush through the door, and fly towards the noise with the swiftness of an arrow. She had listened attentively to Matilda: she heard Lorenzo's name mentioned, and resolved to risk everything to throw herself under his protection. The door was open. The sounds convinced her that the archers could be at no great distance. She mustered up her little remaining strength, rushed by the monk ere he perceived her design, and bent her course rapidly towards the voices. As soon as he recovered from his first surprise, the abbot failed not to pursue her. In vain did Antonia redouble her speed, and stretch every nerve to the utmost. Her enemy gained upon her every moment: she heard his steps close after her, and felt the heat of his breath glow upon her neck. He overtook her; he twisted his hand in the ringlets of her streaming hair, and attempted to drag her back with him to the dungeon. Antonia resisted with all her strength. She folded her arms round a pillar which supported the roof, and shrieked loudly for assistance. In vain did the monk strive to threaten her silence.

"Help!" she continued to exclaim; "help! help! for God's sake!"

Quickened by her cries, the sound of footsteps was heard approaching. The abbot expected every moment to see the inquisitors arrive. Antonia still resisted, and he now enforced her silence by means the most horrible and inhuman. He still grasped Matilda's dagger: without allowing himself a moment's reflection, he raised it, and plunged it twice in the bosom of Antonia. She shrieked, and sank upon the ground. The monk endeavoured to bear her away with him, but she still embraced the pillar firmly. At that instant the light of approaching torches flashed upon the walls. Dreading a discovery, Ambrosio was compelled to abandon his victim, and hastily fled back to the vault, where he had left Matilda.

He fled not unobserved. Don Ramirez happening to arrive the first, perceived a female bleeding upon the ground, and a man flying from the spot, whose confusion betrayed him for the murderer. He instantly pursued the fugitive, with some part of the archers, while the others remained with Lorenzo to protect the wounded stranger. They raised her, and supported her in their arms. She had fainted from excess of pain, but soon gave signs of returning life. She opened her eyes; and on lifting up her head, the quantity of fair hair fell back, which till then had obscured her features.

“God Almighty, it is Antonia!”

Such was Lorenzo's exclamation, while he snatched her from the attendant's arms, and clasped her in his own.

Though aimed by an uncertain hand, the poniard had answered but too well the purpose of its employer. The wounds were mortal, and Antonia was conscious that she never could recover. Yet the few moments which remained for her, were moments of happiness. The concern expressed upon Lorenzo's countenance, the frantic fondness of his complaints, and his earnest enquiries respecting her wounds, convinced her beyond a doubt that his affections were her own. She would not be removed from the vaults, fearing lest motion should only hasten her death; and she was unwilling to lose those moments which she passed in receiving proofs of Lorenzo's love, and assuring him of her own. She told him, that had she still been undefiled she might have lamented the loss of life; but that, deprived of honour and branded with shame, death was to her a blessing: she could not have been his wife; and that hope being denied her, she resigned herself to the grave without one sigh of regret. She bade him take courage, conjured him not to abandon himself to fruitless sorrow, and declared that she mourned to leave nothing in the whole world but him. While every sweet accent increased rather than lightened Lorenzo's grief, she continued to converse with him till the moment of

dissolution. Her voice grew faint, and scarcely audible; a thick cloud spread itself over her eyes; her heart beat slow and irregular, and every instant seemed to announce that her fate was near at hand.

She lay, her head reclining upon Lorenzo's bosom, and her lips still murmuring to him words of comfort. She was interrupted by the convent bell, as tolling at a distance, it struck the hour. Suddenly Antonia's eyes sparkled with celestial brightness; her frame seemed to have received new strength and animation. She started from her lover's arms.

"Three o'clock!" she cried. "Mother, I come!"

She clasped her hands, and sank lifeless upon the ground. Lorenzo, in agony, threw himself beside her. He tore his hair, beat his breast, and refused to be separated from the corse. At length his force being exhausted, he suffered himself to be led from the vault, and was conveyed to the palace de Medina scarcely more alive than the unfortunate Antonia.

In the meantime, though closely pursued, Ambrosio succeeded in regaining the vault. The door was already fastened when Don Ramirez arrived, and much time elapsed 'ere the fugitive's retreat was discovered. But nothing can resist perseverance. Though so artfully concealed, the door could not escape the vigilance of the archers. They forced it open, and entered the vault to the infinite dismay of Ambrosio.

and his companion. The monk's confusion, his attempt to hide himself, his rapid flight, and the blood sprinkled upon his clothes, left no room to doubt his being Antonio's murderer. But when he was recognised for the immaculate Ambrosio, "the man of holiness," the idol of Madrid; the faculties of the spectators were chained up in surprise, and scarcely could they persuade themselves that what they saw was no vision. The abbot strove not to vindicate himself, but preserved a sullen silence. He was secured and bound. The same precaution was taken with Matilda. Her cowl being removed, the delicacy of her features and profusion of her golden hair betrayed her sex; and this incident created fresh amazement. The dagger was also found in the tomb, where the monk had thrown it; and the dungeon having undergone a thorough search, the two culprits were conveyed to the prisons of the Inquisition.

Don Ramirez took care that the populace should remain ignorant both of the crimes and profession of the captives. He feared a repetition of the riots, which had followed the apprehending the prioress of St. Clare. He contented himself with stating to the Capuchins the guilt of their superior. To avoid the shame of a public accusation, and dreading the popular fury, from which they had already saved their abbey with much difficulty, the monks readily permitted the inquisitors



to search their mansion without noise. No fresh discoveries were made. The effects found in the abbot's and Matilda's cells were seized, and carried to the Inquisition to be produced in evidence. Everything else remained in its former position, and order and tranquility once more prevailed through Madrid.

St. Clare's convent was completely ruined by the united ravages of the mob and conflagration. Nothing remained of it but the principal walls, whose thickness and solidity had preserved them from the flames. The nuns who had belonged to it were obliged, in consequence, to disperse themselves into other societies: but the prejudice against them ran high, and the superiors were very unwilling to admit them. However, most of them being related to families the most distinguished for their riches, birth, and power, the several convents were compelled to receive them, though they did it with a very ill grace. This prejudice was extremely false and unjustifiable. After a close investigation, it was proved that all in the convent were persuaded of the death of Agnes, except the four nuns whom St. Ursula had pointed out. These had fallen victims to the popular fury, as had also several who were perfectly innocent and unconscious of the whole affair. Blinded by resentment, the mob had sacrificed every nun who fell into their hands: they who escaped were entirely indebted to the duke de Medina's prudence and moder-

ation. Of this they were conscious, and felt for that nobleman a proper sense of gratitude.

Virginia was not the most sparing of her thanks; she wished equally to make a proper return for his attentions, and to obtain the good graces of Lorenzo's uncle. In this she easily succeeded. The duke beheld her beauty with wonder and admiration; and while his eyes were enchanted with her form, the sweetness of her manners, and her tender concern for the suffering nun, prepossessed his heart in her favour. This Virginia had discernment enough to perceive, and she redoubled her attention to the invalid. When he parted from her at the door of her father's palace, the duke entreated permission to enquire occasionally after her health. His request was readily granted; Virginia assured him, that the marquis de Villa-Franca would be proud of an opportunity to thank him in person for the protection afforded to her. They now separated; he enchanted with her beauty and gentleness, and she much pleased with him, and more with his nephew.

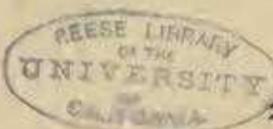
On entering the palace, Virginia's first care was to summon the family physician, and take care of her unknown charge. Her mother hastened to share with her the charitable office. Alarmed by the riots, and trembling for his daughter's safety, who was his only child, the marquis had flown to St. Clare's convent, and was still employed in seeking her. Messengers were

now dispatched on all sides to inform him, that he would find her safe at his hotel, and desire him to hasten thither immediately. His absence gave Virginia liberty to bestow her whole attention upon her patient; and though much disordered herself by the adventures of the night, no persuasion could induce her to quit the bedside of the sufferer. Her constitution being much enfeebled by want and sorrow, it was some time before the stranger was restored to her senses. She found great difficulty in swallowing the medicines prescribed to her; but this obstacle being removed, she easily conquered her disease, which proceeded from nothing but weakness. The attention which was paid her, the wholesome food to which she had been long a stranger, and her joy at being restored to liberty, to society, and, as she dared to hope, to love, all this combined to her speedy re-establishment. From the first moment of knowing her, her melancholy situation, her sufferings almost unparalleled, had engaged the affections of her amiable hostess. Virginia felt for her the most lively interest; but how was she delighted, when, her guest being sufficiently recovered to relate her history, she recognized in the captive nun the sister of Lorenzo!

This victim of monastic cruelty was indeed none other than the unfortunate Agnes. During her abode in the convent, she had been well known to Virginia; but her emaciated form, her features altered by affliction,

her death universally credited, and her overgrown and matted hair which hung over her face and bosom in disorder, at first had prevented her being recollected. The prioress had put every artifice in practice to induce Virginia to take the veil; for the heiress of Villa-Franca would have been no despicable acquisition. Her seeming kindness and unremitting attention so far succeeded, that her young relation began to think seriously upon compliance. Better instructed in the disgust and ennui of a monastic life, Agnes had penetrated the designs of the domina. She trembled for the innocent girl, and endeavoured to make her sensible of her error. She painted in their true colours the numerous inconveniences attached to a convent, the continued restraint, the low jealousies, the petty intrigues, the servile court, and gross flattery expected by the superior. She then bade Virginia reflect on the brilliant prospect which presented itself before her. The idol of her parents, the admiration of Madrid, endowed by nature and education with every perfection of person and mind, she might look forward to an establishment the most fortunate. Her riches furnished her with the means of exercising, in their fullest extent, charity and benevolence, those virtues so dear to her; and her stay in the world would enable her discovering objects worthy her protection, which could not be done in the seclusion of a convent.

Her persuasions induced Virginia to lay aside all thoughts of the veil: but another argument, not used by Agnes, had more weight with her than all the others put together. She had seen Lorenzo when he visited his sister at the grate; his person pleased her, and her conversations with Agnes generally used to terminate in some question about her brother. She, who doted upon Lorenzo, wished for no better than an opportunity to trumpet out his praise. She spoke of him in terms of rapture; and, to convince her auditor how just were his sentiments, how cultivated his mind, and elegant his expressions, she shewed her at different times the letters which she received from him. She soon perceived that from these communications the heart of her young friend had imbibed impressions which she was far from intending to give, but truly happy to discover. She could not have wished her brother a more desirable union: heiress of Villa-Franca, virtuous, affectionate, beautiful, and accomplished, Virginia seemed calculated to make him happy. She sounded her brother upon the subject, though without mentioning names or circumstances. He assured her in his answers, that his heart and hand were totally disengaged, and she thought that upon these grounds she might proceed without danger. She in consequence endeavoured to strengthen the dawning passion of her friend. Lorenzo was made



the constant topic of her discourse; and the avidity with which her auditor listened, the sighs which frequently escaped from her bosom, and the eagerness with which upon any digression she brought back the conversation to the subject whence it had wandered, sufficed to convince Agnes that her brother's addresses would be far from disagreeable. She at length ventured to mention her wishes to the duke. Though a stranger to the lady herself, he knew enough of her situation to think her worthy his nephew's hand. It was agreed between him and his niece, that she should insinuate the idea to Lorenzo, and she only waited his return to Madrid to propose her friend to him as his bride. The unfortunate events which took place in the interim, prevented her from executing her design. Virginia wept her loss severely, both as a companion, and as the only person to whom she could speak of Lorenzo. Her passion continued to prey upon her heart in secret, and she had almost determined to confess her sentiments to her mother, when accident once more threw their object in her way. The sight of him so near her, his politeness, his compassion, his intrepidity, had combined to give new ardour to her affection. When she now found her friend and advocate restored to her, she looked upon her as a gift from heaven; she ventured to cherish the hope of being united to Lorenzo, and resolved to use with him his sister's influence.

Supposing that before her death Agnes might possibly have made the proposal, the duke had placed all his nephew's hints of marriage to Virginia's account; consequently he gave them the most favourable reception. On returning to his hotel, the relation given him of Antonia's death, and Lorenzo's behaviour on the occasion, made evident his mistake. He lamented the circumstances; but the unhappy girl being effectually out of the way, he trusted that his designs would yet be executed. 'Tis true that Lorenzo's situation just then ill suited him for a bridegroom. His hopes disappointed at the moment when he expected to realize them, and the dreadful and sudden death of his mistress, had affected him very severely. The duke found him upon the bed of sickness. His attendants expressed serious apprehensions for his life; but the uncle entertained not the same fears. He was of opinion, and not unwisely, that "men have died, and worms have ate them, but not for love!" He therefore flattered himself, that however deep might be the impression made upon his nephew's heart, time and Virginia would be able to efface it. He now hastened to the afflicted youth, and endeavoured to console him: he sympathised in his distress, but encouraged him to resist the encroachments of despair. He allowed, that he could not but feel shocked at an event so terrible, nor could he blame his sensibility; but he besought him not to torment himself

with vain regrets, and rather to struggle with affliction, and preserve his life, if not for his own sake, at least for the sake of those who were fondly attached to him. While he laboured thus to make Lorenzo forget Antonia's loss, the duke paid his court assiduously to Virginia, and seized every opportunity to advance his nephew's interest in her heart.

It may easily be expected that Agnes was not long without enquiring after Don Raymond. She was shocked to hear the wretched situation to which grief had reduced him; yet she could not help exulting secretly, when she reflected that his illness proved the sincerity of his love. The duke undertook the office himself, of announcing to the invalid the happiness which awaited him. Though he omitted no precaution to prepare him for such an event, at this sudden change from despair to happiness, Raymond's transports were so violent, as nearly to have proved fatal to him. These once passed, the tranquility of his mind, the assurance of felicity, and above all, the presence of Agnes (who was no sooner re-established by the care of Virginia and the marchioness, than she hastened to attend her lover), soon enabled him to overcome the effects of his late dreadful malady. The calm of his soul communicated itself to his body, and he recovered with such rapidity as to create universal surprise.

Not so Lorenzo. Antonia's death, accompanied

with such terrible circumstances, weighed upon his mind heavily. He was worn down to a shadow; nothing could give him pleasure. He was persuaded with difficulty to swallow nourishment sufficient for the support of life, and a consumption was apprehended. The society of Agnes formed his only comfort. Though accident had never permitted their being much together, he entertained for her a sincere friendship and attachment. Perceiving how necessary she was to him, she seldom quitted his chamber. She listened to his complaints with unwearied attention, and soothed him by the gentleness of her manners, and by sympathising with his distress. She still inhabited the palace de Villa-Franca, the possessors of which treated her with marked affection. The duke had intimated to the marquis his wishes respecting Virginia. The match was unexceptionable; Lorenzo was heir to his uncle's immense property, and was distinguished in Madrid for his agreeable person, extensive knowledge, and propriety of conduct. Add to this, that the marchioness had discovered how strong was her daughter's prepossession in his favour.

In consequence, the duke's proposal was accepted without hesitation; every precaution was taken to induce Lorenzo's seeing the lady with these sentiments which she so well merited to excite. In her visits to her brother, Agnes was frequently accompanied by the

marchioness; and as soon as he was able to move into his anti-chamber, Virginia, under her mother's protection, was sometimes permitted to express her wishes for his recovery. This she did with such delicacy, the manner in which she mentioned Antonia was so tender and soothing, and when she lamented her rival's melancholy fate, her bright eyes shone so beautiful through her tears, that Lorenzo could not behold or listen to her without emotion. His relations, as well as the lady, perceived that with every day her society seemed to give him fresh pleasure, and that he spoke of her in terms of stronger admiration. However, they prudently kept their observations to themselves. No word was dropped, which might lead him to suspect their designs. They continued their former conduct and attention, and left time to ripen into a warmer sentiment the friendship which he already felt for Virginia.

In the meanwhile, her visits became more frequent; and latterly there was scarce a day, of which she did not pass some part by the side of Lorenzo's couch. He gradually regained his strength, but the progress of his recovery was slow and doubtful. One evening he seemed to be in better spirits than usual: Agnes and her lover, the duke, Virginia, and her parents were sitting round him. He now for the first time entreated his sister to inform him how she had escaped the effects of the poison which St. Ursula had seen her swallow.



Fearful of recalling those scenes to his mind in which Antonia had perished, she had hitherto concealed from him the history of her sufferings. As he now started the subject himself, and thinking that perhaps the narrative of her sorrows might draw him from the contemplation of those on which he dwelt too constantly, she immediately complied with his request. The rest of the company had already heard her story: but the interest which all present felt for its heroine, made them anxious to hear it repeated. The whole society seconding Lorenzo's entreaties, Agnes obeyed. She first recounted the discovery which had taken place in the abbey chapel, the domina's resentment, and the midnight scene of which St. Ursula had been a concealed witness. Though the nun had already described this latter event, Agnes now related it more circumstantially, and at large. After which she proceeded in her narrative as follows:

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF AGNES

DE MEDINA.

My supposed death was attended with the greatest agonies. Those moments which I believed my last were embittered by the domina's assurances that I could not escape perdition; and as my eyes closed, I heard her rage exhale itself in curses on my offence. The horror of this situation, of a death-bed from which

hope was banished, of a sleep from which I was only to wake to find myself the prey of flames and furies, was more dreadful than I can describe. When animation revived in me, my soul was still impressed with these terrible ideas. I looked round with fear, expecting to behold the ministers of divine vengeance. For the first hour, my senses were so bewildered, and my brain so dizzy, that I strove in vain to arrange the strange images which floated in wild confusion before me. If I endeavoured to raise myself from the ground, the wandering of my head deceived me. Everything around me seemed to rock, and I sank once more upon the earth. My weak and dazzled eyes were unable to bear a nearer approach to a gleam of light which I saw trembling above me. I was compelled to close them again, and remain motionless in the same posture.

A full hour elapsed, before I was sufficiently myself to examine the surrounding objects. When I did examine them, what terror filled my bosom! I found myself extended upon a sort of wicker couch. It had six handles to it, which doubtless had served the nuns to convey me to my grave. I was covered with a linen cloth: several faded flowers were thrown over me. On one side lay a small wooden crucifix; on the other a rosary of large beads. Four low narrow walls confined me. The top was also covered, and in it

was fitted a small grated door, through which was admitted the little air that circulated in this miserable place. A faint glimmering of light, which streamed through the bars, permitted me to distinguish the surrounding horrors. I was oppressed by a noisome suffocating smell; and perceiving that the grated door was unfastened, I thought that I might possibly effect my escape. As I raised myself with this design, my hand rested upon something soft: I grasped it and advanced it towards the light. Almighty God! what was my disgust! my consternation! In spite of its putridity, and the worms which preyed upon it, I perceived a corrupted human head, and recognised the features of a nun who had died some months before. I threw it from me, and sank almost lifeless upon my bier.

When my strength returned, this circumstance, and the consciousness of being surrounded by the loathsome and mouldering bodies of my companions, increased my desire to escape from my fearful prison. I again moved towards the light. The grated door was within my reach. I lifted it without difficulty: probably it had been left unclosed, to facilitate my quitting the dungeon. Aiding myself by the irregularity of the walls, some of whose stones projected beyond the rest, I contrived to ascend them, and drag myself out of my prison. I now found myself in a vault tolerably

spacious. Several tombs, similar in appearance to that whence I had just escaped, were arranged along the sides in order, and seemed to be considerably sunk within the earth. A sepulchral lamp was suspended from the roof by an iron chain, and shed a gloomy light through the dungeon. Emblems of death were seen on every side: skulls, shoulder-blades, thigh-bones, and other reliques of mortality, were scattered upon the dewy ground. Each tomb was ornamented with a large crucifix, and in one corner stood a wooden statue of St. Clare. To these objects I at first paid no attention: a door, the only outlet from the vault, had attracted my eyes. I hastened towards it, having wrapped my winding sheet closely round me. I pushed against the door and to my inexpressible terror found that it was fastened on the outside. I guessed immediately, that the prioress, mistaking the nature of the liquor which she had compelled me to drink, instead of poison had administered a strong opiate. From this I concluded that, being to all appearance dead, I had received the rites of burial; and that, deprived of the power of making my existence known, it would be my fate to expire of hunger. This idea penetrated me with horror, not merely for my own sake, but that of the innocent creature who still lived within my bosom. I again endeavoured to open the door, but it resisted all my efforts. I stretched my voice to the extent of its

compass, and shrieked for aid. I was remote from the hearing of every one. No friendly voice replied to mine. A profound and melancholy silence prevailed through the vault, and I despaired of liberty. My long abstinence from food now began to torment me. The tortures which hunger inflicted on me, were the most painful and insupportable: yet they seemed to increase with every hour which passed over my head. Sometimes I threw myself upon the ground, and rolled upon it wild and desperate: sometimes starting up, I returned to the door, again strove to force it open, and repeated my fruitless cries for succour. Often was I on the point of striking my temple against the sharp corner of some monument, dashing out my brains, and thus terminating my woes at once. But still the remembrance of my baby vanquished my resolution. I trembled at a deed, which equally endangered my child's existence and my own. Then would I vent my anguish in loud exclamations and passionate complaints; and then again my strength failing me, silent and hopeless I would sit me down upon the base of St. Clare's statue, and fold my arms, and abandon myself to sullen despair. Thus passed several wretched hours. Death advanced towards me with rapid strides, and I expected that every succeeding moment would be that of my dissolution. Suddenly a neighbouring tomb caught my eye: a basket stood upon it, which till then I had not observed. I

started from my seat: I made towards it as swiftly as my exhausted frame would permit. How eagerly did I seize the basket, on finding it to contain a loaf of coarse bread and a small bottle of water!

I threw myself with avidity upon these humble aliments. They had to all appearance been placed in the vault for several days. The bread was hard, and the water tainted: yet never did I taste food to me so delicious. When the cravings of appetite were satisfied, I busied myself with conjectures upon this new circumstance. I debated whether the basket had been placed there with a view to my necessity. Hope answered my doubts in the affirmative. Yet who could guess me to be in need of such assistance? If my existence was known, why was I detained in this gloomy vault? If I was kept a prisoner, what meant the ceremony of committing me to the tomb? Or, if I was doomed to perish with hunger, to whose pity was I indebted for provisions placed within my reach? A friend would not have kept my dreadful punishment a secret: neither did it seem probable that an enemy would have taken pains to supply me with the means of existence. Upon the whole I was inclined to think, that the domina's designs upon my life had been discovered by some one of my partisans in the convent, who had found means to substitute an opiate for poison; that she had furnished me with food to support me,

till she could effect my delivery; and that she was then employed in giving intelligence to my relations of my danger, and pointing out a way to release me from captivity. Yet why then was the quality of my provisions so coarse? How could my friend have entered the vault without the domina's knowledge? and if she had entered, why was the door fastened so carefully? These reflections staggered me: yet still this idea was the most favourable to my hopes, and I dwelt upon it in preference.

My meditations were interrupted by the sound of distant footsteps. They approached, but slowly. Rays of light now darted through the crevices of the door. Uncertain whether the persons who advanced came to relieve me, or were conducted by some other motive to the vault, I failed not to attract their notice by loud cries for help. Still the sounds drew near. The light grew stronger. At length with inexpressible pleasure I heard the key turning in the lock. Persuaded that my deliverance was at hand, I flew towards the door with a shriek of joy. It opened; but all my hopes of escape died away, when the prioress appeared, followed by the same four nuns who had been witnesses of my supposed death. They bore torches in their hands, and gazed upon me in fearful silence.

I started back in terror. The domina descended into the vault, as did also her companions. She bent

upon me a stern resentful eye, but expressed no surprise at finding me still living. She took the seat which I had just quitted. The door was again closed, and the nuns ranged themselves behind their superior, while the glare of their torches, dimmed by the vapours and dampness of the vault, gilded with cold beams the surrounding monuments. For some moments all preserved a dead and solemn silence. I stood at some distance from the prioress. At length she beckoned me to advance. Trembling at the severity of her aspect, my strength scarce sufficed me to obey her. I drew near, but my limbs were unable to support their burthen. I sank upon my knees, I clasped my hands, and lifted them up to her for mercy, but had no power to articulate a syllable.

She gazed upon me with angry eyes.

"Do I see a penitent, or a criminal?" she said at length: "Are those hands raised in contrition for your crimes, or in fear of meeting their punishment? Do those tears acknowledge the justice of your doom, or only solicit mitigation of your sufferings? I fear me, 'tis the latter!"

She paused, but kept her eye still fixed upon mine.

"Take courage," she continued; "I wish not for your death, but your repentance. The draught which I administered was no poison, but an opiate. My intention in deceiving you, was to make you feel the

agonies of a guilty conscience, had death overtaken you suddenly, while your crimes were still unrepented. You have suffered those agonies; I have brought you to be familiar with the sharpness of death, and I trust that your momentary anguish will prove to you an eternal benefit. It is not my design to destroy your immortal soul, or bid you seek the grave, burdened with the weight of sins unexpiated. No, daughter, far from it; I will purify you with wholesome chastisement, and furnish you with full leisure for contrition and remorse. Hear then my sentence: The ill-judged zeal of your friends delayed its execution, but cannot now prevent it. All Madrid believes you to be no more; your relations are thoroughly persuaded of your death, and the nuns your partisans have assisted at your funeral. Your existence can never be suspected. I have taken such precautions as must render it an impenetrable mystery. Then abandon all thoughts of a world from which you are eternally separated, and employ the few hours which are allowed you in preparing for the next."

This exordium led me to expect something terrible. I trembled, and would have spoken to deprecate her wrath; but a motion of the domina commanded me to be silent. She proceeded:

"Though of late years unjustly neglected, and now opposed by many of our misguided sisters (whom Heaven

convert!) it is my intention to revive the laws of our order in their full force. That against incontinence is severe, but no more than so monstrous an offence demands. Submit to it, daughter, without resistance; you will find the benefit of patience and resignation in a better life than this. Listen then to the sentence of St. Clare.—Beneath these vaults there exist prisons, intended to receive such criminals as yourself: artfully is their entrance concealed, and she who enters them must resign all hopes of liberty. Thither must you now be conveyed. Food shall be supplied you, but not sufficient for the indulgence of appetite: you shall have just enough to keep together body and soul, and its quality shall be the simplest and coarsest. Weep, daughter, weep, and moisten your bread with your tears: God knows, that you have ample cause for sorrow! Chained down in one of those secret dungeons, shut out from the world and light for ever, with no comfort but religion, no society but repentance; thus must you groan away the remainder of your days. Such are St. Clare's orders; submit to them without repining. Follow me!"

Thunder-struck at this barbarous decree, my little remaining strength abandoned me. I answered only by falling at her feet, and bathing them with tears. The domina, unmoved by my affliction, rose from her seat with a stately air: she repeated her commands in

an absolute tone; but my excessive faintness made me unable to obey her. Mariana and Alix raised me from the ground, and carried me forwards in their arms. The prioress moved on, leaning on Violante, and Camilla preceded her with a torch. Thus passed our sad procession along the passages, in silence only broken by my sighs and groans. We stopped before the principal shrine of St. Clare. The statue was removed from its pedestal, though how I knew not. The nuns afterwards raised an iron grate, till then concealed by the image, and let it fall on the other side with a loud crash. The awful sound, repeated by the vaults above and caverns below me, roused me from the despondent apathy in which I had been plunged. I looked before me: an abyss presented itself to my affrighted eyes, and a steep and narrow staircase whither my conductors were leading me. I shrieked, and started back. I implored compassion, rent the air with my cries, and summoned both heaven and earth to my assistance. In vain! I was hurried down the staircase, and forced into one of the cells which lined the cavern sides.

My blood ran cold as I gazed upon this melancholy abode. The cold vapours hovering in the air, the walls green with damp, the bed of straw so forlorn and comfortless, the chain destined to bind me for ever to my prison, and the reptiles of every description, which,

as the torches advanced towards them, I despaired hurrying to their retreats, struck my heart with terrors almost too exquisite for nature to bear. Driven by despair to madness, I burst suddenly from the nuns who held me; I threw myself upon my knees before the prioress, and besought her mercy in the most passionate and frantic terms.

"If not on me," said I, "look at least with pity on that innocent being, whose life is attached to mine! Great is my crime, but let not my child suffer for it! My baby has committed no fault. Oh! spare me for the sake of my unborn offspring, whom, ere it tastes life, your severity dooms to destruction!"

The prioress drew back hastily; she forced her habit from my grasp, as if my touch had been contagious.

"What!" she exclaimed with an exasperated air: "What! Dare you plead for the produce of your shame? Shall a creature be permitted to live, conceived in guilt so monstrous? Abandoned woman, speak for him no more! Better that the wretch should perish than live: begotten in perjury, incontinence, and pollution, it cannot fail to prove a prodigy of vice. Hear me thou guilty! Expect no mercy from me, either for yourself or brat. Rather pray that death may seize you before you produce it; or, if it must see the light, that its eyes may immediately be closed again for ever! No aid shall be given you in your

labour; bring your offspring into the world yourself, feed it yourself, nurse it yourself, bury it yourself: God grant that the latter may happen soon, lest you receive comfort from the fruit of your iniquity!"

This inhuman speech, the threats which it contained, the dreadful sufferings foretold to me by the domina, and her prayers for my infant's death, on whom, though unborn, I already doted, were more than my exhausted frame could support. Uttering a deep groan, I fell senseless at the feet of my unrelenting enemy.

I know not how long I remained in this situation; but I imagine that some time must have elapsed before my recovery, since it sufficed the prioress and her nuns to quit the cavern. When my senses returned, I found myself in silence and solitude. I heard not even the retiring footsteps of my persecutors. All was hushed, and all was dreadful! I had been thrown upon the bed of straw: the heavy chain which I had already eyed with terror, was wound around my waist, and fastened me to the wall. A lamp glimmering with dull melancholy rays through my dungeon, permitted my distinguishing all its horrors. It was separated from the cavern by a low and irregular wall of stone. A large chasm was left open in it, which formed the entrance, for door there was none. A leaden crucifix was in front of my straw couch. A tattered rug lay near me, as did also a chaplet of beads; and not far

from me stood a pitcher of water, and a wicker-basket containing a small loaf, and a bottle of oil to supply my lamp.

With a despondent eye did I examine this scene of suffering: when I reflected that I was doomed to pass in it the remainder of my days, my heart was rent with bitter anguish. I had once been taught to look forward to a lot so different! At one time my prospects had appeared so bright, so flattering! Now all was lost to me. Friends, comfort, society, happiness, in one moment I was deprived of all! Dead to the world, dead to pleasure, I lived to nothing but the sense of misery. How fair did that world seem to me, from which I was for ever excluded! How many loved objects did it contain, whom I never should behold again! As I threw a look of terror round my prison, as I shrank from the cutting wind which howled through my subterraneous dwelling, the change seemed so striking, so abrupt, that I doubted its reality. That the duke de Medina's niece, that the destined bride of the marquis de las Cisternas, one bred up in affluence, related to the noblest families in Spain, and rich in a multitude of affectionate friends—that she should in one moment become a captive, separated from the world for ever, weighed down with chains, and reduced to support life with the coarsest aliments—appeared a change so sudden and incredible, that I believed myself

the sport of some frightful vision. Its continuance convinced me of my mistake with but too much certainty. Every morning I looked for some relief from my sufferings: every morning my hopes were disappointed. At length I abandoned all idea of escaping, I resigned myself to my fate, and only expected liberty when she came the companion of death.

My mental anguish, and the dreadful scenes in which I had been an actress, advanced the period of my labour. In solitude and misery, abandoned by all, unassisted by art, uncomforted by friendship, with pangs which if witnessed would have touched the hardest heart, was I delivered of my wretched burden. It came alive into the world; but I knew not how to treat it, or by what means to preserve its existence. I could only bathe it with tears, warm it in my bosom, and offer up prayers for its safety. I was soon deprived of this mournful employment: the want of proper attendance, my ignorance how to nurse it, the bitter cold of the dungeon, and the unwholesome air which inflated its lungs, terminated my sweet babe's short and painful existence. It expired in a few hours after its birth, and I witnessed its death with agonies that beggar all description.

But my grief was unavailing. My infant was no more; nor could all my sighs impart to its little tender frame the breath of a moment. I rent my winding-

sheet, and wrapped in it my lovely child. I placed it on my bosom, its soft arm folded round my neck, and its pale cold cheek resting upon mine. Thus did its lifeless limbs repose, while I covered it with kisses, talked to it, wept, and moaned over it without remission day or night. Camilla entered my prison regularly once every twenty-four hours to bring me food. In spite of her flinty nature, she could not behold this spectacle unmoved. She feared that grief so excessive would at length turn my brain; and in truth I was not always in my proper senses. From a principle of compassion she urged me to permit the corse to be buried: but to this I never would consent. I vowed, not to part with it while I had life: its presence was my only comfort, and no persuasion could induce me to give it up. It soon became a mass of putridity, and to every eye was a loathsome and disgusting object, to every eye but a mother's. In vain did human feelings bid me recoil from this emblem of mortality with repugnance. I withstood, and vanquished that repugnance. I persisted in holding my infant to my bosom, in lamenting it, loving it, adoring it! Hour after hour have I passed upon my sorry couch, contemplating what had once been my child. I endeavoured to retrace its features through the livid corruption with which they were overspread. During my confinement, this sad occupation was my only delight; and at that

time worlds should not have bribed me to give it up. Even when released from my prison, I brought away my child in my arms. The representations of my two kind friends—[Here she took the hands of the marchioness and Virginia, and pressed them alternately to her lips]—at length persuaded me to resign my unhappy infant to the grave. Yet I parted from it with reluctance. However, reason at length prevailed; I suffered it to be taken from me, and it now reposes in consecrated ground.

I before mentioned, that regularly once a day Camilla brought me food. She sought not to embitter my sorrows with reproach. She bade me, 'tis true, resign all hopes of liberty and worldly happiness; but she encouraged me to bear with patience my temporary distress, and advised me to draw comfort from religion. My situation evidently affected her more than she ventured to express; but she believed that to extenuate my fault would make me less anxious to repent it. Often while her lips painted the enormity of my guilt in glaring colours, her eyes betrayed how sensible she was to my sufferings. In fact, I am certain that none of my tormenters (for the three other nuns entered my prison occasionally) were so much actuated by the spirit of oppressive cruelty, as by the idea that to afflict my body was the only way to preserve my soul. Nay, even this persuasion might not have had such

weight with them, and they might have thought my punishment too severe, had not their good dispositions been repressed by blind obedience to their superior. Her resentment existed in full force. My project of elopement having been discovered by the abbot of the Capuchins, she supposed herself lowered in his opinion by my disgrace, and in consequence her hate was inveterate. She told the nuns, to whose custody I was committed, that my fault was of the most heinous nature, that no sufferings could equal the offence, and that nothing could save me from eternal perdition but punishing my guilt with the utmost severity. The superior's word is an oracle to but too many of a convent's inhabitants. The nuns believed whatever the prioress chose to assert: though contradicted by reason and charity, they hesitated not to admit the truth of her arguments. They followed her injunctions to the very letter, and were fully persuaded, that to treat me with lenity, or to show the least pity for my woes, would be a direct means to destroy my chance for salvation.

Camilla being most employed about me, was particularly charged by the prioress to treat me with harshness. In compliance with these orders, she frequently strove to convince me how just was my punishment, and how enormous was my crime. She bade me think myself too happy in saving my soul

by mortifying my body, and even threatened me sometimes with eternal perdition. Yet, as I before observed, she always concluded by words of encouragement and comfort; and though uttered by Camilla's lips, I easily recognised the domina's expressions. Once, and once only, the prioress visited me in my dungeon. She then treated me with the most unrelenting cruelty. She loaded me with reproaches, taunted me with my frailty; and, when I implored her mercy, told me to ask it of Heaven, since I deserved none on earth. She even gazed upon my lifeless infant without emotion; and when she left me, I heard her charge Camilla to increase the hardships of my captivity. Unfeeling woman! But let me check my resentment. She has expiated her errors by her sad and unexpected death. Peace be with her! and may her crimes be forgiven in heaven, as I forgive her my sufferings on earth!

Thus did I drag on a miserable existence. Far from growing familiar with my prison, I beheld it every moment with new horror. The cold seemed more piercing and bitter, the air more thick and pestilential. My frame became weak, feverish, and emaciated. I was unable to rise from the bed of straw, and exercise my limbs in the narrow limits to which the length of my chain permitted me to move. Though exhausted, faint, and weary, I trembled to profit by the approach of sleep. My slumbers were constantly interrupted by

some obnoxious insect crawling over me. Sometimes I felt the bloated toad, hideous and pampered with the poisonous vapours of the dungeon, dragging his loathsome length along my bosom. Sometimes the quick cold lizard roused me, leaving his slimy track upon my face, and entangling itself in the tresses of my wild and matted hair. Often have I at waking found my fingers ringed with the long worms which bred in the corrupted flesh of my infant. At such times I shrieked with terror and disgust; and, while I shook off the reptile, trembled with all a woman's weakness.

Such was my situation when Camilla was suddenly taken ill. A dangerous fever, supposed to be infectious, confined her to her bed. Every one, except the lay sister appointed to nurse her, avoided her with caution, and feared to catch the disease. She was perfectly delirious, and by no means capable of attending to me. The domina, and the nuns admitted to the mystery, had latterly entirely given me over to Camilla's care. In consequence, they busied themselves no more about me; and occupied by preparing for the approaching festival, it is more than probable that I never once entered into their thoughts. Of the reason of Camilla's negligence I have been informed since my release by the mother St. Ursula. At that time I was very far from suspecting its cause. On the contrary, I waited

for my gaoler's appearance at first with impatience, and afterwards with despair. One day passed away: another followed it: the third arrived. Still no Camilla! still no food! I knew the lapse of time by the wasting of my lamp, to feed which, fortunately a week's supply of oil had been left me. I supposed, either that the nuns had forgotten me, or that the domina had ordered them to let me perish. The latter idea seemed the most probable: yet so natural is the love of life, that I trembled to find it true. Though embittered by every species of misery, my existence was still dear to me, and I dreaded to lose it. Every succeeding minute proved to me that I must abandon all hopes of relief. I was become an absolute skeleton: my eyes already failed me, and my limbs were beginning to stiffen. I could only express my anguish, and the pangs of that hunger which gnawed my heartstrings, by frequent groans, whose melancholy sound the vaulted roof of the dungeon re-echoed. I resigned myself to my fate: I already expected the moment of dissolution, when my guardian angel—when my beloved brother arrived in time to save me. My sight, grown dim and feeble, at first refused to recognise him: and when I did distinguish his features, the sudden burst of rapture was too much for me to bear. I was overpowered by the swell of joy at once more beholding a friend, and that a friend so dear to me. Nature could not

support my emotions, and took her refuge in insensibility.

You already know what are my obligations to the family of Villa-Franca. But what you cannot know, is the extent of my gratitude, boundless as the excellence of my benefactors. Lorenzo! Raymond! names so dear to me! teach me to bear with fortitude this sudden transition from misery to bliss. So lately a captive, oppressed with chains, perishing with hunger, suffering every inconvenience of cold and want, hidden from the light, excluded from society, hopeless, neglected, and as I feared, forgotten: now restored to life and liberty, enjoying all the comforts of affluence and ease, surrounded by those who are most loved by me, and on the point of becoming his bride who has long been wedded to my heart, my happiness is so exquisite, so perfect, that scarcely can my brain sustain the weight. One only wish remains ungratified. It is to see my brother in his former health, and to know that Antonia's memory is buried in her grave. Granted this prayer, I have nothing more to desire. I trust that my past sufferings have purchased from heaven the pardon of my momentary weakness. That I have offended, offended greatly and grievously, I am fully conscious. But let not my husband, because he once conquered my virtue, doubt the propriety of my future conduct. I have been frail and full of error: but I yielded not to the warmth of constitution. Raymond, affection for

you betrayed me. I was too confident of my strength: but I depended no less on your honour than my own. I had vowed never to see you more. Had it not been for the consequences of that unguarded moment, my resolution had been kept. Fate willed it otherwise, and I cannot but rejoice at its decree. Still my conduct has been highly blameable; and while I attempt to justify myself, I blush at recollecting my imprudence. Let me then dismiss the ungrateful subject: first assuring you, Raymond, that you shall have no cause to repent our union, and that, the more culpable have been the errors of your mistress, the more exemplary shall be the conduct of your wife.

Here Agnes ceased; and the marquis replied to her address in terms equally sincere and affectionate. Lorenzo expressed his satisfaction at the prospect of being so closely connected with a man for whom he had ever entertained the highest esteem. The Pope's bull had fully and effectually released Agnes from her religious engagements. The marriage was therefore celebrated as soon as the needful preparations had been made: for the marquis wished to have the ceremony performed with all possible splendour and publicity. This being over, and the bride having received the compliments of Madrid, she departed with Don Raymond for his

castle in Andalusia. Lorenzo accompanied them, as did also the marchioness de Villa-Franca and her lovely daughter. It is needless to say that Theodore was of the party, and it would be impossible to describe his joy at his master's marriage. Previous to his departure, the marquis, to atone in some measure for his past neglect, made some enquiries relative to Elvira. Finding that she, as well as her daughter, had received many services from Leonella and Jacintha, he shewed his respect to the memory of his sister-in-law by making the two women handsome presents. Lorenzo followed his example. Leonella was highly flattered by the attentions of noblemen so distinguished, and Jacintha blessed the hour on which her house was bewitched.

On her side, Agnes failed not to reward her convent friends. The worthy mother St. Ursula, to whom she owed her liberty, was named at her request, superintendent of "the Ladies of Charity." This was one of the best and most opulent societies throughout Spain. Bertha and Cornelia, not choosing to quit their friend, were appointed to principal charges in the same establishment. As to the nuns who had aided the domina in persecuting Agnes; Camilla, being confined by illness to her bed, had perished in the flames which consumed St. Clare's convent. Mariana, Alix, and Violante, as well as two more, had fallen victims to the popular rage. The three others who had in council supported

the domina's sentence, were severely reprimanded, and banished to religious houses in obscure and distant provinces. Here they languished away a few years, ashamed of their former weakness, and shunned by their companions with aversion and contempt.

Nor was the fidelity of Flora permitted to go unrewarded. Her wishes being consulted, she declared herself impatient to revisit her native land. In consequence, a passage was procured for her to Cuba, where she arrived in safety, loaded with the presents of Raymond and Lorenzo.

The debts of gratitude discharged, Agnes was at liberty to pursue her favourite plan. Lodged in the same house, Lorenzo and Virginia were eternally together. The more he saw of her, the more was he convinced of her merit. On her part, she laid herself out to please; and not to succeed was for her impossible. Lorenzo witnessed with admiration her beautiful person, elegant manners, innumerable talents, and sweet disposition. He was also much flattered by her prejudice in his favour, which she had not sufficient art to conceal. However, his sentiments partook not of that ardent character which had marked his affection for Antonia. The image of that lovely and unfortunate girl still lived in his heart, and baffled all Virginia's efforts to displace it. Still, when the duke proposed to him the match, which he wished so earnestly to

take place, his nephew did not reject the offer. The urgent supplications of his friends, and the lady's merit, conquered his repugnance to entering into new engagements. He proposed himself to the marquis de Villa-Franca, and was accepted with joy and gratitude. Virginia became his wife, nor did she ever give him cause to repent his choice. His esteem increased for her daily. Her unremitting endeavours to please him could not but succeed. His affection assumed stronger and warmer colours. Antonia's image was gradually effaced from his bosom, and Virginia became sole mistress of that heart, which she well deserved to possess without a partner.

The remaining years of Raymond and Agnes, of Lorenzo and Virginia, were happy as can be those allotted to mortals, born to be the prey of grief, and sport of disappointment. The exquisite sorrows with which they had been afflicted, made them think lightly of every succeeding woe. They had felt the sharpest darts in misfortune's quiver. Those which remained, appeared blunt in comparison. Having weathered fate's heaviest storms, they looked calmly upon its terrors: or, if ever they felt affliction's casual gales, they seemed to them gentle as zephyrs which breathe over summer seas.

CHAPTER VII.

— He was a fell despightful fiend:
Hell holds none worse in baleful bower below:
By pride, and wit, and rage, and rancor keened:
Of man, alike if good or bad, the foe.—THOMSON.



N the day following Antonia's death, all Madrid was a scene of consternation and amazement. An archer who had witnessed the adventure in the sepulchre, had indiscreetly related the circumstances of the murder: he had also named the perpetrator. The confusion was without example, which this intelligence raised among the devotees. Most of them disbelieved it, and went themselves to the abbey to ascertain the fact. Anxious to avoid the shame to which their superior's ill-conduct exposed the whole brotherhood, the monks assured the visitors, that Ambrosio was prevented from receiving them as usual by nothing but illness. This attempt was unsuccessful. The same excuse being repeated day after day, the archer's story gradually obtained confidence. The

abbot's partisans abandoned him: no one entertained a doubt of his guilt: and they who before had been the warmest in his praise, were now the most vociferous in his condemnation.

While his innocence or guilt was debated in Madrid with the utmost acrimony, Ambrosio was a prey to the pangs of conscious villainy, and the terrors of punishment impending over him. When he looked back to the eminence on which he had lately stood, universally honoured and respected, at peace with the world and with himself, scarcely could he believe that he was indeed the culprit, whose crimes and whose fate he trembled to consider. But a few weeks had elapsed, since he was pure and virtuous, courted by the wisest and noblest in Madrid, and regarded by the people with a reverence that approached idolatry. He now saw himself stained with the most loathed and monstrous sins, the object of universal execration, a prisoner of the Holy Office, and probably doomed to perish in tortures the most severe. He could not hope to deceive his judges: the proofs of his guilt were too strong. His being in the sepulchre at so late an hour, his confusion at the discovery, the dagger which in his first alarm he owned had been concealed by him, and the blood which had spirted upon his habit from Antonia's wound, sufficiently marked him out for the assassin. He waited with agony for the day of examination.

He had no resource to comfort him in his distress. Religion could not inspire him with fortitude. If he read the books of morality which were put into his hands, he saw in them nothing but the enormity of his offences. If he attempted to pray, he recollect ed that he deserved not heaven's protection, and believed his crimes so monstrous as to exceed even God's infinite goodness. For every other sinner he thought there might be hope, but for him there could be none. Shuddering at the past, anguished by the present, and dreading the future, thus passed he the few days preceding that which was marked for his trial.

That day arrived. At nine in the morning his prison door was unlocked; and his gaoler entering, commanded him to follow him. He obeyed with trembling. He was conducted into a spacious hall hung with black cloth. At the table sat three grave stern-looking men, also habited in black: one was the Grand Inquisitor, whom the importance of this cause had induced to examine into it himself. At a smaller table at a little distance sat the secretary, provided with all necessary implements for writing. Ambrosio was beckoned to advance, and take his station at the lower end of the table. As his eye glanced downwards, he perceived various iron instruments lying scattered upon the floor. Their forms were unknown to him, but apprehension immediately guessed them to be engines

of torture. He turned pale, and with difficulty prevented himself from sinking to the ground.

Profound silence prevailed, except when the inquisitors whispered a few words among themselves mysteriously. Near an hour passed away, and with every second of it Ambrosio's fears grew more poignant. At length a small door, opposite to that by which he had entered the hall, grated heavily upon its hinges. An officer appeared, and was immediately followed by the beautiful Matilda. Her hair hung about her face wildly: her cheeks were pale, and her eyes sunk and hollow. She threw a melancholy look upon Ambrosio: he replied by one of aversion and reproach. She was placed opposite to him. A bell then sounded thrice. It was the signal for opening the court; and the inquisitors entered upon their office.

In these trials neither the accusation is mentioned nor the name of the accuser. The prisoners are only asked, whether they will confess. If they reply, that, having no crime, they can make no confession, they are put to the torture without delay. This is repeated at intervals, either till the suspected avow themselves culpable, or the perseverance of the examinants is worn out and exhausted; but without a direct acknowledgment of their guilt, the Inquisition never pronounces the final doom of its prisoners. In general, much time is suffered to elapse without their being

questioned; but Ambrosio's trial had been hastened on account of a solemn *Auto da Fé* which would take place in a few days, and in which the inquisitors meant this distinguished culprit to perform a part, and give a striking testimony of their vigilance.

The abbot was not merely accused of rape and murder; the crime of sorcery was laid to his charge, as well as to Matilda's. She had been seized as an accomplice in Antonia's assassination. On searching her cell, various suspicious books and instruments were found, which justified the accusation brought against her. To criminate the monk, the constellated mirror was produced, which Matilda had accidentally left in his chamber. The strange figures engraved upon it caught the attention of Don Ramirez, while searching the abbot's cell: in consequence, he carried it away with him. It was shewn to the Grand Inquisitor, who, having considered it for some time, took off a small golden cross which hung at his girdle, and laid it upon the mirror. Instantly a loud noise was heard, resembling a clap of thunder, and the steel shivered into a thousand pieces. This circumstance confirmed the suspicion of the monk's having dealt in magic. It was even supposed, that his former influence over the minds of the people was entirely to be ascribed to witchcraft.

Determined to make him confess not only the

crimes he had committed, but those also of which he was innocent, the inquisitors began their examination. Though dreading the tortures, as he yet more dreaded death, which would consign him to eternal torments, the abbot asserted his purity in a voice bold and resolute. Matilda followed his example, but spoke with fear and trembling. Having in vain exhorted him to confess, the inquisitors ordered the monk to be put to the question. The decree was immediately executed. Ambrosio suffered the most excruciating pangs that were ever invented by human cruelty. Yet so dreadful is death, when guilt accompanies it, that he had sufficient fortitude to persist in his disavowal. His agonies were redoubled in consequence; nor was he released till, fainting from excess of pain, insensibility rescued him from the hands of his tormentors.

Matilda was next ordered to the torture; but, terrified by the sight of the friar's sufferings, her courage totally deserted her. She sank upon her knees, acknowledged her corresponding with infernal spirits, and that she had witnessed the monk's assassination of Antonia; but as to the crime of sorcery, she declared herself the sole criminal, and Ambrosio perfectly innocent. The latter assertion met with no credit. The abbot had recovered his senses in time to hear the confession of his accomplice: but he was too much enfeebled by what he had already undergone,



to be capable at that time of sustaining new torments. He was commanded back to his cell, but first informed, that as soon as he had gained strength sufficient he must prepare himself for a second examination. The inquisitors hoped that he would then be less hardened and obstinate. To Matilda it was announced, that she must expiate her crime in fire on the approaching *Auto da Fé*. All her tears and entreaties could procure no mitigation of her doom, and she was dragged by force from the hall of trial.

Returned to his dungeon, the sufferings of Ambrosio's body were far more supportable than those of his mind. His dislocated limbs, the nails torn from his hands and feet, and his fingers mashed and broken by the pressure of screws, were far surpassed in anguish by the agitation of his soul and vehemence of his terrors. He saw that, guilty or innocent, his judges were bent upon condemning him. The remembrance of what his denial had already cost him, terrified him at the idea of being again applied to the question, and almost engaged him to confess his crimes. Then again the consequences of his confession flashed before him, and rendered him once more irresolute. His death would be inevitable, and that a death the most dreadful. He had listened to Matilda's doom, and doubted not that a similar was reserved for him. He shuddered at the approaching *Auto da Fé*, at the idea

of perishing in flames, and only escaping from endurable torments to pass into others more subtile and everlasting! With affright did he bend his mind's eye on the space beyond the grave; nor could hide from himself how justly he ought to dread Heaven's vengeance. In this labyrinth of terrors, fain would he have taken his refuge in the gloom of atheism; fain would he have denied the soul's immortality; have persuaded himself that, when his eyes once closed, they would never more open, and that the same moment would annihilate his soul and body. Even this resource was refused to him. To permit his being blind to the fallacy of this belief, his knowledge was too extensive, his understanding too solid and just. He could not help feeling the existence of a God. Those truths, once his comfort, now presented themselves before him in the clearest light; but they only served to drive him to distraction. They destroyed his ill-grounded hopes of escaping punishment; and, dispelled by the irresistible brightness of truth and conviction, philosophy's deceitful vapours faded away like a dream.

In anguish almost too great for mortal frame to bear, he expected the time when he was again to be examined. He busied himself in planning ineffectual schemes for escaping both present and future punishment. Of the first there was no possibility; of the second despair made him neglect the only means. While

Reason forced him to acknowledge a God's existence, Conscience made him doubt the infinity of His goodness. He disbelieved that a sinner like himself could find mercy. He had been deceived into error; ignorance could furnish him with no excuse. He had seen vice in her true colours. Before he committed his crimes, he had computed every scruple of their weight, and yet he had committed them.

"Pardon?" he would cry in an access of frenzy: "Oh! there can be none for me!"

Persuaded of this, instead of humbling himself in penitence, of deplored his guilt, and employing his few remaining hours in deprecating heaven's wrath, he abandoned himself to the transports of desperate rage; he sorrowed for the punishment of his crimes, not their commission; and exhaled his bosom's anguish in idle sighs, in vain lamentations, in blasphemy and despair. As the few beams of day which pierced through the bars of his prison-window gradually disappeared, and their place was supplied by the pale and glimmering lamp, he felt his terrors redouble, and his ideas become more gloomy, more solemn, more despondent. He dreaded the approach of sleep. No sooner did his eyes close, wearied with tears and watching, than the dreadful visions seemed to be realised, on which his mind had dwelt during the day. He found himself in sulphurous realms and burning caverns, surrounded by fiends

appointed his tormentors, and who drove him through a variety of tortures, each of which was more dreadful than the former. Amidst these dismal scenes wandered the ghosts of Elvira and her daughter. They reproached him with their deaths, recounted his crimes to the demons, and urged them to inflict torments of cruelty yet more refined. Such were the pictures that floated before his eyes in sleep: they vanished not till his repose was disturbed by excess of agony. Then would he start from the ground on which he had stretched himself, his brows running down with cold sweat, his eyes wild and frenzied; and he only exchanged the terrible certainty for surmises scarcely more supportable. He paced his dungeon with disordered steps; he gazed with terror upon the surrounding darkness, and often did he cry,

“Oh! fearful is night to the guilty!”

The day of his second examination was at hand. He had been compelled to swallow cordials, whose virtues were calculated to restore his bodily strength, and enable him to support the question longer. On the night preceding this dreaded day, his fears for the morrow permitted him not to sleep. His terrors were so violent as nearly to annihilate his mental powers. He sat like one stupefied near the table on which his lamp was burning dimly. Despair chained up his faculties in idiotism, and he remained for some hours unable to speak or move, or indeed to think.

"Look up, Ambrosio!" said a voice in accents well known to him.

The monk started, and raised his melancholy eyes. Matilda stood before him. She had quitted her religious habit. She now wore a female dress, at once elegant and splendid; a profusion of diamonds blazed upon her robes, and her hair was confined by a coronet of roses. In her right hand she held a small book: a lively expression of pleasure beamed upon her countenance—but still it was mingled with a wild imperious majesty, which inspired the monk with awe, and repressed in some measure his transports at seeing her.

"You here, Matilda?" he at length exclaimed: "How have you gained entrance? Where are your chains? What means this magnificence, and the joy which sparkles in your eyes? Have our judges relented? Is there a chance of my escaping? Answer me for pity, and tell me what I have to hope or fear."

"Ambrosio!" she replied with an air of commanding dignity: "I have baffled the Inquisition's fury. I am free: a few moments will place kingdoms between these dungeons and me; yet, I purchase my liberty at a dear, at a dreadful price! Dare you pay the same, Ambrosio? Dare you spring without fear over the bounds which separate men from angels?—You are silent—You look upon me with eyes of suspicion and alarm—I read your thoughts and confess

their justice. Yes, Ambrosio, I have sacrificed all for life and liberty. I am no longer a candidate for heaven! I have renounced God's service, and am enlisted beneath the banners of his foes. The deed is past recall; yet were it in my power to go back, I would not. Oh! my friend, to expire in such torments! to die amidst curses and execrations! to bear the insults of an exasperated mob! to be exposed to all the mortifications of shame and infamy! who can reflect without horror on such a doom! Let me then exult in my exchange. I have sold distant and uncertain happiness for present and secure. I have preserved a life, which otherwise I had lost in torture; and I have obtained the power of procuring every bliss which can make that life delicious! The infernal spirits obey me as their sovereign; by their aid shall my days be passed in every refinement of luxury and voluptuousness. I will enjoy unrestrained the gratification of my senses; every passion shall be indulged even to satiety; then will I bid my servants invent new pleasures, to revive and stimulate my glutted appetites! I go impatient to exercise my newly gained dominion. I pant to be at liberty. Nothing should hold me one moment longer in this abhorred abode, but the hope of persuading you to follow my example. Ambrosio I still love you: our mutual guilt and danger have rendered you dearer to me than ever, and I would fain save you from im-

pending destruction. Summon then your resolution to your aid, and renounce for immediate and certain benefits the hopes of salvation difficult to obtain, and perhaps altogether erroneous. Shake off the prejudice of vulgar souls! abandon a God who has abandoned you, and raise yourself to the level of superior beings!"

She paused for the monk's reply: he shuddered while he gave it.

"Matilda!" he said, after a long silence, in a low and unsteady voice: "What price gave you for liberty?"

She answered him firm and dauntless.

"Ambrosio, it was my soul!"

"Wretched woman, what have you done! Pass but a few years, and how dreadful will be your sufferings!"

"Weak man, pass but this night, and how dreadful will be your own! Do you remember what you have already endured? To-morrow you must bear torments doubly exquisite. Do you remember the horrors of a fiery punishment? In two days you must be led a victim to the stake! what then will become of you? Still dare you hope for pardon? Still are you beguiled with visions of salvation? Think upon your crimes! Think upon your lust, your perjury, inhumanity, and hypocrisy! Think upon the innocent blood which cries to the throne of God for vengeance! and then hope

for mercy? Then dream of heaven, and sigh for worlds of light, and realms of peace and pleasure! Absurd! Open your eyes, Ambrosio, and be prudent. Hell is your lot; you are doomed to eternal perdition; nought lies beyond your grave, but a gulph of devouring flames. And will you then speed towards that hell? Will you clasp that perdition in your arms ere 'tis needful? Will you plunge into those flames while you still have the power to shun them? 'Tis a madman's action. No, no, Ambrosio, let us for awhile fly from divine vengeance. Be advised by me, purchase by one moment's courage the bliss of years; enjoy the present, and forget that a future lags behind."

"Matilda, your counsels are dangerous; I dare not, I will not follow them. I must not give up my claim to salvation. Monstrous are my crimes; but God is merciful, and I will not despair of pardon."

"Is such your resolution? I have no more to say. I speed to joy and liberty, and abandon you to death and eternal torments!"

"Yet stay one moment, Matilda! You command the infernal demons; you can force open these prison doors; you can release me from these chains which weigh me down. Save me, I conjure you, and bear me from these fearful abodes!"

"You ask the only boon beyond my power to bestow. I am forbidden to assist a churchman and

a partisan of God. Renounce those titles, and command me."

"I will not sell my soul to perdition."

"Persist in your obstinacy till you find yourself at the stake: then will you repent your error, and sigh for escape when the moment is gone by. I quit you.—Yet ere the hour of death arrives, should wisdom enlighten you, listen to the means of repairing your present fault. I leave with you this book. Read the first four lines of the seventh page backwards. The spirit, whom you have already once beheld, will immediately appear to you. If you are wise we shall meet again; if not, farewell for ever!"

She let the book fall upon the ground. A cloud of blue fire wrapped itself round her. She waved her hand to Ambrosio, and disappeared. The momentary glare which the flames poured through the dungeon, on dissipating suddenly, seemed to have increased its natural gloom. The solitary lamp scarcely gave light sufficient to guide the monk to a chair. He threw himself into his seat, folded his arms, and, leaning his head upon the table, sank into reflections perplexing and unconnected.

He was still in this attitude, when the opening of the prison door roused him from his stupor. He was summoned to appear before the Grand Inquisitor. He rose, and followed his gaoler with painful steps. He

was led into the same hall, placed before the same examiners, and was again interrogated whether he would confess. He replied as before, that, having no crimes, he could acknowledge none. But when the executioners prepared to put him to the question, when he saw the engines of torture, and remembered the pangs which they had already inflicted, his resolution failed him entirely. Forgetting the consequences, and only anxious to escape the terrors of the present moment, he made an ample confession. He disclosed every circumstance of his guilt, and owned not merely the crimes with which he was charged, but those of which he had never been suspected. Being interrogated as to Matilda's flight, which had created much confusion, he confessed that she had sold herself to Satan, and that she was indebted to sorcery for her escape. He still assured his judges, that for his own part he had never entered into any compact with the infernal spirits; but the threat of being tortured made him declare himself to be a sorcerer and heretic, and whatever other title the inquisitors chose to fix upon him. In consequence of this avowal, his sentence was immediately pronounced. He was ordered to prepare himself to perish in the *Auto da Fé*, which was to be solemnized at twelve o'clock that night. This hour was chosen from the idea that, the horror of the flames being heightened by the gloom of midnight, the execution

would have a greater effect upon the mind of the people. Ambrosio, rather dead than alive, was left alone in his dungeon. The moment in which this terrible decree was pronounced, had nearly proved that of his dissolution. He looked forward to the morrow with despair, and his terrors increased with the approach of midnight. Sometimes he was buried in gloomy silence; at others, he raved with delirious passion, wrung his hands, and cursed the hour when he first beheld the light. In one of these moments his eye rested upon Matilda's mysterious gift. His transports of rage were instantly suspended. He looked earnestly at the book; he took it up, but immediately threw it from him with horror. He walked rapidly up and down his dungeon—then stopped, and again fixed his eyes on the spot where the book had fallen. He reflected, that here at least was a resource from the fate which he dreaded. He stooped, and took it up a second time. He remained for some time trembling and irresolute; he longed to try the charm, yet feared its consequences. The recollection of his sentence at length fixed his indecision. He opened the volume; but his agitation was so great, that he at first sought in vain for the page mentioned by Matilda. Ashamed of himself, he called all his courage to his aid. He turned to the seventh leaf: he began to read it aloud; but his eyes frequently wandered from the book, while



he anxiously cast them round in search of the spirit, whom he wished, yet dreaded to behold. Still he persisted in his design; and with a voice unassured, and frequent interruptions, he contrived to finish the four first lines of the page.

They were in a language whose import was totally unknown to him. Scarce had he pronounced the last word, when the effects of the charm were evident. A loud burst of thunder was heard, the prison shook to its very foundations, a blaze of lightning flashed through the cell, and in the next moment, borne upon sulphurous whirlwinds, Lucifer stood before him a second time. But he came not as when at Matilda's summons he borrowed the seraph's form to deceive Ambrosio. He appeared in all that ugliness which since his fall from heaven had been his portion. His blasted limbs still bore marks of the Almighty's thunder. A swarthy darkness spread itself over his gigantic form: his hands and feet were armed with long talons. Fury glared in his eyes, which might have struck the bravest heart with terror. Over his huge shoulders waved two enormous sable wings: and his hair was supplied by living snakes, which twined themselves round his brows with frightful hissings. In one hand he held a roll of parchment, and in the other an iron pen. Still the lightning flashed around him, and the thunder with repeated bursts seemed to announce the dissolution of Nature.

Terrified at an apparition so different from what he had expected, Ambrosio remained gazing upon the fiend, deprived of the power of utterance. The thunder had ceased to roll: universal silence reigned through the dungeon.

"For, what am I summoned hither?" said the demon, in a voice which *sulphurous fogs had damped to hoarseness*.

At the sound Nature seemed to tremble. A violent earthquake rocked the ground, accompanied by a fresh burst of thunder, louder and more appalling than the first.

Ambrosio was long unable to answer the demon's demand.

"I am condemned to die," he said with a faint voice, his blood running cold while he gazed upon his dreadful visitor. "Save me! bear me from hence!"

"Shall the reward of my services be paid me? Dare you embrace my cause? Will you be mine, body and soul? Are you prepared to renounce Him who made you, and Him who died for you? Answer but 'Yes!' and Lucifer is your slave."

"Will no less price content you? Can nothing satisfy you but my eternal ruin? Spirit, you ask too much. Yet convey me from this dungeon. Be my servant for one hour, and I will be yours for a thousand years. Will not this offer suffice?"

"It will not. I must have your soul: must have it mine, and mine for ever."

"Insatiate demon! I will not doom myself to endless torments. I will not give up my hopes of being one day pardoned."

"You will not? On what chimera rest then your hopes? Short-sighted mortal! Miserable wretch! Are you not guilty? Are you not infamous in the eyes of men and angels? Can such enormous sins be forgiven? Hope you to escape my power? Your fate is already pronounced. The Eternal has abandoned you. Mine you are marked in the book of destiny, and mine you must and shall be."

"Fiend! 'tis false. Infinite is the Almighty's mercy, and the penitent shall meet His forgiveness. My crimes are monstrous, but I will not despair of pardon. Haply, when they have received due chastisement——"

"Chastisement? Was purgatory meant for guilt like yours? Hope you, that your offences shall be bought off by prayers of superstitious dotards and droning monks? Ambrosio! be wise. Mine you must be. You are doomed to flames, but may shun them for the present. Sign this parchment: I will bear you from hence, and you may pass your remaining years in bliss and liberty. Enjoy your existence. Indulge in every pleasure to which appetite may lead you.

But from the moment that it quits your body, remember that your soul belongs to me, and that I will not be defrauded of my right."

The monk was silent; but his looks declared that the tempter's words were not thrown away. He reflected on the conditions proposed with horror. On the other hand, he believed himself doomed to perdition, and that, by refusing the demon's succour, he only hastened tortures which he could never escape. The fiend saw that his resolution was shaken. He renewed his instances, and endeavoured to fix the abbot's indecision. He described the agonies of death in the most terrific colours; and he worked so powerfully upon Ambrosio's despair and fears, that he prevailed upon him to receive the parchment. He then struck the iron pen which he held into a vein of the monk's left hand. It pierced deep, and was instantly filled with blood: yet Ambrosio felt no pain from the wound. The pen was put into his hand: it trembled. The wretch placed the parchment on the table before him, and prepared to sign it. Suddenly he held his hand: he started away hastily, and threw the pen upon the table.

"What am I doing?" he cried. Then turning to the fiend with a desperate air, "Leave me! begone! I will not sign the parchment."

"Fool!" exclaimed the disappointed demon, darting looks so furious as penetrated the friar's soul with

horror. "Thus am I trifled with? Go then! Rave in agony, expire in tortures, and then learn the extent of the Eternal's mercy! But beware how you make me again your mock! Call me no more, till resolved to accept my offers. Summon me a second time to dismiss me thus idly, and these talons shall rend you into a thousand pieces. Speak yet again: will you sign the parchment?"

"I will not. Leave me. Away!"

Instantly the thunder was heard to roll horribly: once more the earth trembled with violence: the dungeon resounded with loud shrieks, and the demon fled with blasphemy and curses.

At first, the monk rejoiced at having resisted the seducer's arts, and obtained a triumph over mankind's enemy: but as the hour of punishment drew near, his former terrors revived in his heart. Their momentary repose seemed to have given them fresh vigour. The nearer that the time approached, the more did he dread appearing before the throne of God. He shuddered to think how soon he must be plunged into eternity—how soon meet the eyes of his Creator, whom he had so grievously offended. The bell announced midnight. It was the signal for being led to the stake. As he listened to the first stroke, the blood ceased to circulate in the abbot's veins. He heard death and torture murmured in each succeeding sound. He

expected to see the archers entering his prison; and as the bell forbore to toll, he seized the magic volume in a fit of despair. He opened it, turned hastily to the seventh page, and, as if fearing to allow himself a moment's thought, ran over the fatal lines with rapidity. Accompanied by his former terrors, Lucifer again stood before the trembler.

"You have summoned me," said the fiend. "Are you determined to be wise? Will you accept my conditions? You know them already. Renounce your claim to salvation, make over to me your soul, and I bear you from this dungeon instantly. Yet is it time. Resolve, or it will be too late. Will you sign the parchment?"

"I must—Fate urges me—I accept your conditions."

"Sign the parchment," replied the demon in an exulting tone.

The contract and the bloody pen still lay upon the table. Ambrosio drew near it. He prepared to sign his name. A moment's reflection made him hesitate.

"Hark!" cried the tempter: "they come. Be quick. Sign the parchment, and I bear you from hence this moment."

In effect, the archers were heard approaching, appointed to lead Ambrosio to the stake. The sound encouraged the monk in his resolution.

"What is the import of this writing?" said he,

"It makes your soul over to me for ever, and without reserve.

"What am I to receive in exchange?"

"My protection, and release from this dungeon. Sign it, and this instant I bear you away."

Ambrosio took up the pen. He set it to the parchment. Again his courage failed him. He felt a pang of terror at his heart, and once more threw the pen upon the table.

"Weak and puerile!" cried the exasperated fiend. "Away with this folly! Sign the writing this instant, or I sacrifice you to my rage."

At this moment the bolt of the outward door was drawn back. The prisoner heard the rattling of chains: the heavy bar fell: the archers were on the point of entering. Worked up to frenzy by the urgent danger, shrinking from the approach of death, terrified by the demon's threats, and seeing no other means to escape destruction, the wretched monk complied. He signed the fatal contract, and gave it hastily into the evil spirit's hands, whose eyes, as he received the gift, glared with malicious rapture.

"Take it!" said the God-abandoned. "Now then save me! Snatch me from hence!"

"Hold! Do you freely and absolutely renounce your Creator and His Son?"

"I do! I do!"

"Do you make over your soul to me for ever?"

"For ever!"

"Without reserve or subterfuge? without future appeal to the divine mercy?"

The last chain fell from the door of the prison. The key was heard turning in the lock. Already the iron door grated heavily upon its rusty hinges—

"I am yours for ever, and irrevocably!" cried the monk, wild with terror: "I abandon all claim to salvation. I own no power but yours. Hark! Hark! they come! Oh! save me! bear me away!"

"I have triumphed! You are mine past reprieve, and I fulfil my promise."

While he spoke, the door unclosed. Instantly the demon grasped one of Ambrosio's arms, spread his broad pinions, and sprang with him into the air. The roof opened as they soared upwards, and closed again when they had quitted the dungeon.

In the meanwhile, the gaoler was thrown into the utmost surprise by the disappearance of his prisoner. Though neither he nor the archers were in time to witness the monk's escape, a sulphurous smell prevailing through the prison sufficiently informed them by whose aid he had been liberated. They hastened to make their report to the Grand Inquisitor. The story, how a sorcerer had been carried away by the Devil, was soon noised about Madrid; and for some days the

whole city was employed in discussing the subject. Gradually it ceased to be the topic of conversation. Other adventures arose whose novelty engaged universal attention: and Ambrosio was soon forgotten as totally as if he had never existed. While this was passing, the monk, supported by his infernal guide, traversed the air with the rapidity of an arrow; and a few moments placed him upon a precipice's brink, the steepest in Sierra Morena.

Though rescued from the Inquisition, Ambrosio as yet was insensible of the blessings of liberty. The damning contract weighed heavy upon his mind; and the scenes in which he had been a principal actor, had left behind them such impressions as rendered his heart the seat of anarchy and confusion. The objects now before his eyes, and which the full moon sailing through clouds permitted him to examine, were ill calculated to inspire that calm, of which he stood so much in need. The disorder of his imagination was increased by the wildness of the surrounding scenery; by the gloomy caverns and steep rocks, rising above each other, and dividing the passing clouds; solitary clusters of trees scattered here and there, among whose thick-twined branches the wind of night sighed hoarsely and mournfully; the shrill cry of mountain eagles, who had built their nests among these lonely deserts; the stunning roar of torrents, as swelled by late rains

they rushed violently down tremendous precipices; and the dark waters of a silent sluggish stream, which faintly reflected the moonbeams, and bathed the rock's base on which Ambrosio stood. The abbot cast round him a look of terror. His infernal conductor was still by his side, and eyed him with a look of mingled malice, exultation and contempt.

"Whither have you brought me?" said the monk at length in a hollow trembling voice: "Why am I placed in this melancholy scene? Bear me from it quickly! Carry me to Matilda!"

The fiend replied not, but continued to gaze upon him in silence. Ambrosio could not sustain his glance; he turned away his eyes, while thus spoke the demon:

"I have him then in my power! This model of piety! this being without reproach! this mortal who placed his puny virtues on a level with those of angels. He is mine! irrevocably, eternally mine! Companions of my sufferings! denizens of hell! how grateful will be my present!"

He paused; then addressed himself to the monk—

"Carry you to Matilda?" he continued, repeating Ambrosio's words: "Wretch! you shall soon be with her! You well deserve a place near her, for hell boasts no miscreant more guilty than yourself. Hark, Ambrosio, while I unveil your crimes! You have shed

the blood of two innocents; Antonia and Elvira perished by your hand. That Antonia whom you violated was your sister! that Elvira whom you murdered gave you birth! Tremble, abandoned hypocrite! inhuman parricide! incestuous ravisher! tremble at the extent of your offences! And you it was who thought yourself proof against temptation, absolved from human frailties, and free from error and vice! Is pride then a virtue? Is inhumanity no fault? Know, vain man! that I long have marked you for my prey: I watched the movements of your heart; I saw that you were virtuous from vanity, not principle, and I seized the fit moment of seduction. I observed your blind idolatry of the Madona's picture. I bade a subordinate, but crafty spirit assume a similar form, and you eagerly yielded to the blandishments of Matilda. Your pride was gratified by her flattery; your lust only needed an opportunity to break forth; you ran into the snare blindly, and scrupled not to commit a crime, which you blamed in another with unfeeling severity. It was I who threw Matilda in your way; it was I who gave you entrance to Antonia's chamber; it was I who caused the dagger to be given you which pierced your sister's bosom; and it was I who warned Elvira in dreams of your designs upon her daughter, and thus, by preventing your profiting by her sleep, compelled you to add rape, as well as incest to the



catalogue of your crimes. Hear, hear, Ambrosio! Had you resisted me one minute longer, you had saved your body and soul. The guards whom you heard at your prison-door, came to signify your pardon. But I had already triumphed: my plots had already succeeded. Scarcely could I propose crimes so quick as you performed them. You are mine, and Heaven itself cannot rescue you from my power. Hope not that your penitence will make void our contract. Here is your bond, signed with your blood; you have given up your claim to mercy, and nothing can restore to you the rights which you have foolishly resigned. Believe you that your secret thoughts escaped me? No, no, I read them all! You trusted that you should still have time for repentance. I saw your artifice, knew its falsity, and rejoiced in deceiving the deceiver! You are mine beyond reprieve: I burn to possess my right, and alive you quit not these mountains."

During the demon's speech, Ambrosio had been stupefied by terror and surprise. This last declaration aroused him.

"Not quit these mountains alive?" he exclaimed: "Perfidious, what mean you? Have you forgotten our contract?"

The fiend answered by a malicious laugh:

"Our contract? Have I not performed my part? What more did I promise than to save you from your

prison? Have I not done so? Are you not safe from the Inquisition—safe from all but from me? Fool that you were to confide yourself to a devil! Why did you not stipulate for life, and power, and pleasure? Then all would have been granted: now, your reflections come too late. Miscreant, prepare for death; you have not many hours to live!"

On hearing this sentence, dreadful were the feelings of the devoted wretch! He sank upon his knees, and raised his hands towards heaven. The fiend read his intention, and prevented it—

"What?" he cried, darting at him a look of fury: "Dare you still implore the Eternal's mercy? Would you feign penitence, and again act an hypocrite's part? Villain, resign your hopes of pardon. Thus I secure my prey!"

As he said this, darting his talons into the monk's shaven crown, he sprang with him from the rock. The caves and mountains rang with Ambrosio's shrieks. The demon continued to soar aloft, till, reaching a dreadful height, he released the sufferer. Headlong fell the monk through the airy waste; the sharp point of a rock received him; and he rolled from precipice to precipice, till, bruised and mangled, he rested on the river's banks. Instantly a violent storm arose: the winds in fury rent up rocks and forests: the sky was now black with clouds, now sheeted with fire: the rain

fell in torrents: it swelled the stream; the waves overflowed their banks; they reached the spot where Ambrosio lay, and when they abated, carried with them into the river the corse of the despairing monk.

Haughty Lady, why shrunk you back when yon poor frail-one drew near? Was the air infected by her errors? Was your purity soiled by her passing breath? Ah! Lady, smooth that insulting brow: stifle the reproach, just bursting from your scornful lip: wound not a soul, that bleeds already! She has suffered, suffers still. Her air is gay, but her heart is broken: her dress sparkles, but her bosom groans.

Lady, to look with mercy on the conduct of others, is a virtue no less than to look with severity on your own.

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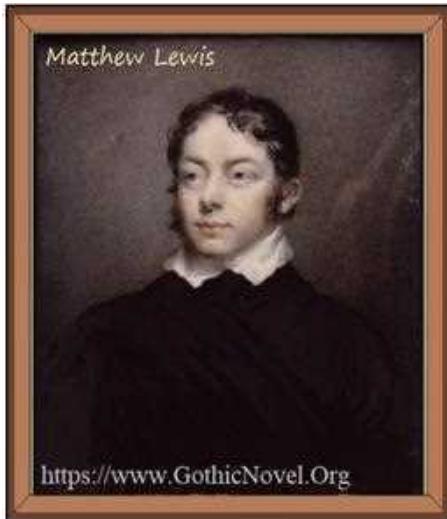
POSTFACE NOTE

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