

DE WILLENBERG;

OR,

THE TALISMAN.

A TALE OF MYSTERY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY I. M. H. HALES, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF THE ASTROLOGER.

Such is the weakness of all mortal hope,
So fickle is the state of earthly things,
That ere they come into their aimed scope,
They fall so short of our frail reckonings,
And bring us bale and bitter sorrowings,
Instead of comfort, which we should embrace—
This is the state of Cæsars and of Kings.
Let none, therefore, that is in meaner place,
Too greatly grieve at any his unlucky case. SPENSER.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.



As an author standing before the awful bar of public criticism, alternately fearing its condemnation, and hoping for its mercy, I have already made my appeal ; and thanks perhaps to the humility of my work—perhaps to public lenity, that appeal hath not been made in vain !

Now to which of these to attribute the approbation evinced by the lovers and readers of romance, and by personages more sage and experienced than those who usually come under

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such denomination, towards the first-born of my pen in the world of fiction, I am really at a loss to determine. Be it as it may, my book has been read, and (shall I say?) praised. Oh, vanity, vanity, that is too much! Well then I will only say, that had I been as learned an "Astrologer" as Osmin the monk, I should have foreseen his reception, and carried him through *six* good-sized volumes instead of three; thus doubling the profits to the bookseller and myself, like many shrewd and sensible authors of the present day.

To be serious, I must beg leave to assure the world, that the popularity of

of my first work, and the suggestions of my friends, are my chief inducements in publishing the present volumes. May the same planet that the "Astrologer" was born under, rule their destiny!

So much for an author's modesty. Now for a few words as to the work itself.

To more than the merits of a romance it does not aspire, being entirely the offspring of imagination; but let it not hence be inferred that it will, with unbecoming humility, take its station below many other productions of the press.

There is hardly any style of writing that affords so ample a field for grand imagery and effect, or enables an author to display so powerfully the exuberance of fancy, or the infinitude of invention ; it is a style, too, which I profess to be my forte ; and with this assurance, the reader with whom it is equally a favourite, may expect to derive equal gratification from the following pages.

DE

DE WILLENBERG.

CHAPTER I.

Thou who didst subdue
Thy country's foes, ere thou wouldst pause to feel
The wrath of thy own wrongs.

Childe Harold, Canto IV.

IN one of those memorable battles when Poland bravely strove to maintain its liberties and independence against the numerous hostilities that environed that unfortunate country, the javelin of a Cossack was furiously aimed at the bosom of the royal Augustus, then sovereign and leader of the Polish armies.

Swift as lightning, at that critical mo-
B 3 ment,

ment, a young cavalier rushed forward, and with one stroke of his sabre severed the arm from the body of the ruffian who had thus sought the king's life, and who, notwithstanding the agony inflicted by the wound, instantly galloped off, and effected his escape amidst the bustle of the contending troops.

Extraordinary courage and presence of mind were amongst the characteristics of the monarch, but he could not help reflecting on this attack upon his life with horror, and on his escape with gratitude to his deliverer, who still remained beside him, and, in a voice of the most anxious solicitude, entreated him no longer to expose his royal person to such danger in the heat of the contest.

Exclusive of the circumstance which had thus introduced him to his notice, there was in the figure and countenance of the young soldier something so interesting,

resting, that the king felt immediately prepossessed in his favour. At the same time, a certain grandeur and dignity in his mien declared his birth to be noble, and at once assured the beholder that his mind was equally ennobled with every sentiment that dignifies human nature.

“To whom, signor, am I indebted for this service?” interrogated the king; “tell me, that I may, if possible, proportionately reward you.”

“Sire,” said the hero, in a tone of unaffected modesty, “my reward is the consciousness of having done my duty, in preserving a life so dear to the people; for my name, I am ambitious of no higher than that of your majesty’s deliverer.” Saying this, he put spurs to his charger, and was returning to his post, when the voice of the king commanded him to stop.

“Stay, noble stranger,” said the latter; “I cannot be so easily put off; you are an ornament to your profession, and——”

At this instant a simultaneous shout of "Victory! victory!" ran through the ranks, and arrested the king's attention.

Success had this day crowned the determined bravery of the Poles, and the delightful and inspiring sound thrilled through the whole frame of the enraptured Augustus, who was thus hastily summoned away.

"I am now pressed for time, my friend," continued he, "and can afford you but the present moment, yet think not that I shall forget your gallant conduct. Take this ring," said he, drawing a brilliant of value from his finger; "be it a pledge of my gratitude and friendship. When our conquering troops have left the field, and peace and tranquillity are once more restored amongst us, I shall expect to see you at the palace; till then, farewell!" and shaking hands with him, he disappeared, hurried on by the yet sounding
cry

cry of "Victory!" while his preserver, proud of what he had done, merely because he had done a laudable action, hastened also to his station, equally elated with the loud exclamations of triumph that issued from every tongue.

The battle was now decided; and having repelled the invaders to a man, the king led off his rejoicing soldiers, and returned to his palace in Warsaw.

A few leagues from that city resided the count Herman, one of the oldest nobles of the court. His venerable mansion had beheld the rise and decline of many generations, and hither had its present owner retired some years before, from the bustle of state affairs, to enjoy that *otium cum dignitate* which those who have long and faithfully served their country, and conscientiously discharged their duties to the world, can alone truly experience.

The castle was of Gothic architecture, and the ivy that crept round the towers with which it was flanked, as if to shelter them from the mouldering hand of time, proclaimed its vast antiquity, whilst its yet stately summit looked down with an air of majesty on the vast expanse of foliage, and seemed to lord it over the extensive forests that surrounded it.

In this sequestered abode of his ancestors, whose antique magnificence called back to his enthusiastic mind the days when they had existed, the count Herman was now spending the happy evening of his life.

The principal companion of his retirement was a daughter, the pride of his heart, and the only surviving child from a beloved wife, who had expired in giving birth to her; but with *such* a companion he seldom wished for any other, and still seldom visited the capital.

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On emerging from her infancy, her father, whose office of prime minister at the court of Augustus's predecessor rendered it impossible for him to superintend her education, had placed her in a neighbouring monastery, the superior of which was his particular friend, and under whose maternal care and able tuition the amiable Victoria made a rapid progress in every branch of female education.

Nature had gifted her with those accomplishments that art cannot always bestow. To a refined taste and highly-cultivated talents, were united the purest, the most valuable inmates of the human breast, all the lovely and endearing qualities on which virtue had placed its most indelible stamp.

To her inferiors, equals, and superiors, she was alike an object of admiration and esteem; and the tears of genuine sorrow and regret, that her departure at the allot-

ted time from the convent drew from every eye, were amongst the most indubitable testimonies of her worth. Her figure was tall and strikingly elegant—her features bore the same stamp of beauty that her heart did of purity—her every look beamed with sweetness and affability; and when, thus lamented, she quitted for ever the sacred mansion where she had passed so many happy hours, it looked like a venerable tree dismantled of its richest blossom.

Such was Victoria, when, at the age of sixteen, her rank introduced her to the fashionable circles she was born to ornament.

There a crowd of admiring votaries followed her steps on all sides, with such incessant homage as would have subverted the principles of a weaker mind—there her charms subdued many a proud heart, which never till then had acknowledged
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the influence of such a passion as love; yet amidst the praise and adulation that every where met her ear, she remained unchanged—amidst all that could tempt the vanity of woman. It afforded her no triumph to behold in her train numerous victims pining for that affection she could never bestow on them—for that hand which a monarch might in vain have sued for, if she could not accompany it with her heart. Wealth and exalted rank, with all their fascinations, daily wooed her, and daily were rejected.

Anger, disappointment, and admiration, were the alternate feelings of her unsuccessful suitors; and all at length concurred in declaring, that however fair, soft, and bewitching, was the form that enshrined it, nature, as if fearful of bringing mortal too near to perfection, had given her a heart hewn from the solid interior of some flinty rock or mountain of adamant.

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This, however, was far from being the case; her heart was all female softness, and possessed all the finer susceptibilities of woman. Though unmoved by the professions of adoration that on all sides assailed her, she was by no means insensible to the merits and attractions of the other sex.

Amongst those, the one whom fate had reserved for her affections was the interesting and accomplished Theodore de Willenberg, a distant relative of her father, and one of the select few now admitted to their society at the castle, where, however, his profession precluded him from being a constant visitor.

He had been at this period about a year in the service of his country, and nearly attained the age of twenty-one. Nature had done much for him; he possessed a form and manners so fascinating, and particularly calculated to please, that at the first interview he ever made a favourable
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and lasting impression ; and his mind was so highly furnished with the richest talents and most refined acquirements, that his society was universally courted, and his amiable qualities the theme of every tongue.

The battalion to which he belonged was commanded by Leopold, duke of Silesia, brother to the king, with whom he fought in conjunction against the Russian invaders and their allies ; and so much did the distinguished qualifications and marked attentions paid to De Willenberg give umbrage to the haughty Leopold, that, stung with envy, his heart at length cherished against him sentiments of the most implacable hatred.

Theodore's paternal residence was on the delightful banks of the Vistula, and not many miles from Warsaw. He was an only son ; no expence had been spared in his education, and the partiality he in his juvenile years

years evinced for a military life met such encouragement from a fond uncle, then captain in the ——— regiment, that he enlisted under the banners of Mars, contrary to the wishes of his father.

M. de Willenberg, a man of very few mental or personal recommendations, and whose chief characteristics were avarice and implacability of temper, had long looked upon the daughter of an opulent merchant, of low origin, as the most eligible match for his son, and hesitated not to propose her to him. The coldness, however, with which such a proposal was received, could only be equalled by the ardency with which the old man had hoped for its acceptance.

No two beings in the world could have been more unlike each other than Theodore de Willenberg and the proud and repulsive Maddeline de Klopstock, who, to an exterior by no means captivating,
added

added all the vulgarisms of low birth and low education.

Such a woman was, of course, not at all calculated to inspire any bosom with those tender sentiments that M. de Willenberg had expected her to awaken in his son, who, seeing himself almost forced into compliance, after in vain representing her as an object of total indifference, if not dislike to him, had recourse to the friendship of his uncle, through whose interest he obtained an ensigncy, as the only means of subsistence, well knowing that his father would no longer countenance him, after having decidedly rejected the one whom he had selected to unite him to.

From a breach of filial duty his upright heart would, under any other circumstances, have revolted, but, conscious that to obey the unreasonable commands of a mercenary parent would be to sacrifice his peace and happiness for ever, he felt it to
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be a duty he owed himself to refuse. Soon, alas! he saw how imprudent was the step he had last taken. The munificence of his uncle for a while amply supplied his every want, and made him regard him as another father, from whom too he was shortly taught to form great expectations of future wealth and aggrandizement. But how uncertain are all human affairs! A fall from his horse instantaneously deprived his generous patron of life, and dying intestate, the hopes of Theodore were thus annihilated—all the property seized on by persons who stood in the same degree of consanguinity with himself, and he was left wholly dependent on his profession for support.

The poignant grief to which he for a while yielded himself, was not the effect of disappointment—it was one of the noblest feelings of nature, called forth by the loss of a friend he so valued and esteemed.

By

By perseverance and profitable speculations in the earlier part of his life, M. de Willenberg had realized an immense fortune; consequently, ere Theodore had thrown off the paternal yoke, he had naturally looked forward to the possession of it at some future day; but the prospect was now no more. Incensed at his son's refusal of the woman he had chosen, and wished him to marry, and not less so at his having acted in opposition to his wishes, in embracing the profession of arms, he had, after a long struggle with his feelings (for, notwithstanding his disobedience, he yet could not help loving him), resolved not only to forbid him to approach him more, but to cut him off with a trifling sum, barely sufficient to supply his present exigencies, and leave the bulk of his property to a distant relative, in reversion after the death of his wife.

This resolution once formed, all the entreaties

treaties of madame de Willenberg in behalf of Theodore could not dissuade him from it: he accordingly wrote him a letter to that effect, every line of which was couched in terms of anger and reproach. Theodore, however, was not hastily disheartened; he sometimes fancied he had acted rashly and culpably, in not employing every exertion to obtain his father's forgiveness, except that of receiving the hand of Maddeline, to which any alternative seemed preferable. But still he trusted that time would soften, and perhaps remove, the rigorous decree. He believed this letter to have been merely dictated by hasty resentment, and even that the sentiments it expressed were in a great measure feigned.

With the idea that his father was less incensed and less obdurate than he really was, and that a few submissive entreaties on his part would bring about a reconciliation, he addressed several letters to him, but

but without receiving any reply, except once from his mother, and that clandestinely. This was an additional mortification to him: few were the sacrifices he would not have made to be again restored to his father's arms; but amongst those few was that of marrying mademoiselle Klopstock, and, what his mother had hinted at, quitting the army.

In Theodore all the finest qualities of the human heart were united—every thing was his that dignifies man: his soul was that of an hero; and while it glowed with valour, around it played all the softer passions that dwell in the bosom of excellence and virtue: for his present profession nature seemed to have intended him, and he had determined that nothing should induce him to abandon it.

His family was a collateral branch of the noble house of Herman, and the count had frequently offered to introduce him
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at court, where his lordship was high in favour with the king, and where, he doubted not, he would very soon obtain promotion. But Theodore, while ambition was a stranger to his bosom, was too proud to stoop to the example of many other courtiers, in seeking advancement rather by favour than by merit or desert; and the count, while he accused him of indifference to his own interest, internally applauded his magnanimity.

It may hence be concluded that he possessed no small share of esteem at the castle, where he had ever been a welcome inmate, and where, now that he was apparently cast off by his inexorable father, he was almost peculiarly an object of its worthy lord's attention.

His incessant military duties had for some months past prevented him from visiting there; but, now that war no longer engaged him in actual service, he intended

intended to fulfil a promise he had given, to spend the summer with them. That promise was to Victoria at once a source of pleasure and of pain; for the fascinating De Willenberg, the envy of his own sex, and the idol of the other, was the one who had first awakened in her bosom sensations, the nature of which she scarcely understood, and such as, until she beheld him, she had never experienced. She knew him to be generous, amiable, and in every way worthy of her esteem, of which her father's partiality for him was an indubitable proof; yet she dared not ask herself why she entertained such a predilection for *him* in particular, or why *he* should have made such an impression on a heart that had been so completely proof against all the efforts of so many others? Yet in her moments of meditation on the subject, and those moments would sometimes occur, she fancied, though hardly knowing why, that her father, could he view that impression, might not quite
approve

approve of it; nay more, might wish it to be erased altogether.

In despite of these ideas, however, she could not help secretly wishing for the arrival of the hour when she should again see him, again hear his voice, and enjoy his delightful conversation.

That hour was now not far distant; and at length a letter addressed to the count brought the long-expected intelligence of his arrival, with his regiment, in the metropolis, whence, in a few days, he was to set out for Herman Castle.

CHAP.

CHAPTER II.
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“ Look like the innocent flower,  
But be the serpent under it.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE succession of Augustus to the crown of Poland was an event equally gratifying to himself and his people, by whom he was universally beloved. As a prince, he was of ancient and illustrious descent—as a general, he possessed every requisite for his high office, profoundly skilled as he was in all the arts of war, in which he had been initiated ere he had long passed his infancy.

Independent of his other claims to the throne, a laudable ambition to espouse publicly the cause of a suffering and persecuted nation, and uphold his tottering country,

country, urged him on, and, determined on exerting all his mental and corporeal energies in their support, he became their king, under auspices the most flattering, and hopes the most sanguine; nor were those hopes disappointed.

His character as a man was almost every thing that man ought to be; but, like other mortals, he had his faults and his defects: in his resolves he was ardent and persevering; but that ardency sometimes carried him too far; he could not immediately brook contradiction to his will; but the calm voice of reason soon won him to listen to its dictates, and then he never failed to obey them.

He was in his twenty-sixth year—handsome and unmarried, the daring incursions of the surrounding powers having kept him hitherto in so continual a state of warfare, as to have scarcely left in his mind a vacuum for any other object or idea but that  
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of defeating their bold usurpations and their treacheries. The iron hand of war and the din of battle had, however, not subdued the softer and finer feelings of his bosom—those feelings which it is the pride of man to acknowledge—those noble feelings which so far constitute his superiority over all the other works of nature. The heart of Augustus sighed for a partner in his domestic retirement, worthy to be the confidant of his bosom, to be the object of his affections, and to share with him his wealth and royal dignities; and fondly he hoped that he had now seen the woman calculated in every way to render him happy as a wife, and ensure the love and attachment of her country as its queen.

Such a woman as this did Poland's sovereign deem our amiable heroine; and to her it was his determination to offer his hand, for his heart was decidedly hers already. He had first seen her by chance when she was on a visit with an aunt in

the metropolis; and being instantly struck with the loveliness of her person, from that moment he felt that nature had formed his heart for the enjoyment of a tenderer passion than any he had ever yet experienced.

The recommencement of hostilities quickly afterwards calling him to the field, almost wore off for a while the impression she had made; and, ignorant who she was, he had also despaired of ever seeing her again; but fate had otherwise ordained. A few days subsequent to the late victory, having occasion to confer with count Herman on some important subject, he rode to the castle, and there, to his inexpressible surprise and joy, recognized the beautiful object who had so captivated him. More captivated than ever was the delighted young monarch now in his introduction to Victoria, who, although she beheld herself in the presence of her sovereign, conversed with all her accustomed ease

ease and cheerfulness, nor for a moment lost that unembarrassed air which at once distinguishes the polite and well-bred in addressing those whom fortune has placed in a more elevated station of life than their own.

Hours rolled away (and quickly they appeared to roll) ere he thought of departing; and when he did, his regret was softened by the sanguine hopes he entertained that she would, when he proposed it, consent to become his wife. At first he apprehended some obstacles, from a well-founded supposition that the nation would not readily agree to his marrying any woman in whose veins flowed not the blood of royalty: but a little consideration set him at ease on that point.

The admirable policy of his government, and the well-known excellence of his private character, independent of the good he had done for his country, rendered him

the idol of his subjects, who he knew would, in almost any way, contribute to his happiness, having repeatedly experienced convincing proofs of their attachment. Never had that attachment more forcibly displayed itself than in their unfeigned joy at his safe return from the field of battle, whose worst dangers he had nobly braved and providentially escaped. His grateful heart, which never forgot a benefit, did not allow him to omit mentioning, in the highest terms, the valour and bravery of the unknown hero who had preserved his life at the imminent hazard of his own.

Words seemed inadequate to express the gratitude and admiration his auditors felt, as he recounted to them, with a degree of warmth amounting to enthusiasm, the expression of the noble young stranger—the magnanimity evinced in his reply to his majesty's interrogatory.

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One general impulse actuated all.—  
“Matchless youth!” cried they, unanimously, “such an action—so invaluable a service as he has thus rendered us in saving the life of our beloved sovereign, never—never can be obliterated from our minds; but our gratitude must not be confined to mere words: he shall be as nobly and magnificently rewarded as he deserves: your majesty has surely promised him this?”

“In my haste I gave him not such a promise verbally,” returned the king; “but I had within myself determined what to do. I have given him my ring as a proof of my friendship, and invited him to the palace, whither I trust he will not fail to come: I shall then be able to convince him more fully how high a place he holds in my esteem.”

“And convince him, sire,” cried they, “by an act that will reflect equal honour upon both of you—by his promotion.”

This matter being decided, manifested to Augustus most unequivocally the loyalty and affection of his people: surely then it was natural to conclude, that to a measure so nearly connected with his happiness as the choice of Victoria for his consort, they would cheerfully give their concurrence, the moment they should become acquainted with his passion for her. With this hope he reached the palace, and resolved to make the first communication of it to his brother, the duke of Silesia, whom he forthwith summoned to a private conference.

Leopold had heard ere now of the extraordinary beauty of count Herman's daughter, whom, notwithstanding his known indifference to the charms of the whole race of woman, he had long wished to behold. He was therefore in some measure prepared to hear the string of encomiums lavished on her by the fascinated monarch. He patiently listened to his

his ardent description of her beauties and her accomplishments; but when he spoke of *marrying* her, Leopold suddenly started, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment and disapprobation—"Can your majesty," he interrogated, "really have such a thing in contemplation—a thing so unparalleled, as a great and absolute sovereign to unite himself in marriage to a subject? No, no! it is impossible—quite impossible, that you can be otherwise than in jest!"

"I am serious, duke," replied the offended monarch, haughtily; and a visible expression of displeasure darkening his brow, at once assured Leopold that he was so; "herein I am capable of judging for myself, and require neither your advice nor your reproofs."

To give umbrage now to his royal brother, the duke was well aware would be far from conducive to his own interest; and, assuming a different tone, he endeavoured to retract what he had said—

“ Pardon me, sire,” continued he, “ my words by no means meant reproof; though I avow the idea of count Herman’s daughter being elevated to the rank of Poland’s queen, from her present rustic and secluded state, *did* a little surprise me at first, and I doubted the sincerity of your professions of love for her; but if such is your majesty’s pleasure, and that she can augment the happiness of your reign, why should I interfere—by what authority should I presume to offer an objection?”

“ Hear me then, and doubt no longer,” said the king, with frigid dignity: “ no female charms ever inspired my bosom with a ray of love until I saw Victoria. As soon as my eyes rested on her, she became the chosen of my heart; and should her lips sanction that choice, she shall be queen of Poland.”

This was said in so firm and determined a tone, that Leopold, who had his secret motives

motives for it, deemed it expedient to call dissimulation to his aid ; and he expressed a hope that she would prove in every respect congenial to his majesty's sentiments, and worthy to fill a station so exalted.

The countenance of Augustus glowed with animation as he fervently exclaimed —“ I have already found her every thing that renders woman amiable: she is worthy to be queen of half the universe, and the retirement in which she lives only conceals her loveliness from the world, as the earth within its dark recesses conceals the costly gem, ere the mechanic has dug it thence, and fitted it to deck the monarch's head who wears it.”

“ Has she yet given any encouragement to your hopes ?” demanded the duke.

“ None ; for as yet she knows them not ; but what have I to fear ? think you she would refuse to wed her king, and intermingle the blood of royalty in her children's

dren's veins—or if she *would*, do you think she *dare* refuse me?”

“That is a harsh word, my brother,” observed Leopold, emphatically, “and best befits a tyrant; but I will speak my mind—I *do* think so.”

“Your speech grows bolder, duke, and may perhaps anger me.”

“Then, sire, I will for a moment brave your anger, in endeavouring to undeceive you,” added Leopold, with firmness. “By what prerogative would your majesty *compel* the lady Victoria to accept your hand? it was not to trample on the people's rights and liberties, that you were raised to the throne of your illustrious ancestors: nay, listen to me—you are here a king, surrounded by your subjects, whose loyal hearts regard you as a father; while virtue guides and justice shapes your actions, they hold your person sacred; but beware—dismiss for a moment from your sight those guardians of your safety, your throne, deprived of their support, would totter,

totter, yourself would headlong fall from the pinnacle of your present greatness, and the very men, now so faithful to you, would join and stretch the sinews of their arms to hurl you thence more quickly."

"I feel the full force and justness of your reasoning, Leopold," said the king, taking his brother's hand affectionately, "nor shall it be lost upon me; you have addressed me as a friend and a brother ought to do; your candour has displayed the soundness of your understanding, and the excellence of your heart, for which you are dearer to me than ever: yes, a monarch should be the father of his people, and he who does not respect their rights forfeits the appellation of father or of man; in this you have proved my best counsellor, and I will obey you. I will woo the heart and the hand of Victoria, and having gained them, place her on that throne she is so eminently qualified to adorn."

A smile

A smile of satisfaction shot across the features of Leopold; it was evident that the king was not aware of his having a powerful rival in Theodore de Willenberg, one likely to dispute the prize with him, and one also likely to obtain it; and he who *did* know it thought it not quite politic to inform him.

“You will be able,” resumed his majesty good-humouredly, “to judge yourself of my opinion of female perfection at to-morrow night’s hall, where the lady in question, accompanied by her father, will be, and where I am chagrined that etiquette will prevent me from being present.”

“I too regret that such restraint should be imposed on you,” said the duke, in a well-feigned voice, to corroborate his words; “but the pleasure you are thus obliged to forego, will surely be doubled when you meet her, with the delightful prospect

prospect of obtaining such a woman as you describe her for your wife."

"Would to Heaven that hope were now confirmed, Leopold—changed to more delightful certainty! would that my suspense were at an end, for amidst all my hopes, still do I sometimes doubt."

"Oh! would indeed that it were, sire! 'tis my most fervent wish."

"'Tis then in your power, my brother, to contribute to the accomplishment of that wish. I am about to put your friendship for me to the test; I will consult one of my ministers on this subject, and should he approve and sanction the measure, I will, with your highness' permission, depute you to be the bearer of my wishes to count Herman, to demand the lady Victoria in marriage; aye, tell him Augustus, king of Poland, loves his daughter, and if ambition is not dead within them, she shall be queen."

"But what if he decline such an honour?" said the duke, with peculiar energy.

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“ Do not suggest such a possibility, Leopold—remember how much of my happiness depends on his compliance. But we will, in a few days, talk further of this affair, for some time must elapse after my visit this morning, ere I make a proposal so unexpected by them, and, perhaps I might add, so unprecedented; meantime prepare your own heart to withstand her fascinations at the approaching ball.”

This ball was to be given, in commemoration of the victory, by a large party of officers, headed by the duke of Silesia; and the latter now anxiously counted all the tedious hours, thinking every succeeding one longer and longer, until the appointed evening arrived, so eager was he to feast his eyes with this paragon of loveliness.

Victoria was not less impatient than the duke, but that impatience was excited by a very different object; she knew she would

would there meet De Willenberg, after a long—long absence; and on the ensuing day, or at farthest the one after, he was to become her father's guest; oh, joyful anticipation! an inmate under the same roof with herself!

At length came the evening so ardently wished for by all parties—by many, too, of the votaries of pleasure and dissipation, to whom the ball seemed of infinitely more importance than the victory it was intended to celebrate.

De Willenberg felt alternately elated and depressed, as he prepared to accompany his brother officers to the magnificent hotel where it was to take place, for there he was to meet Victoria; this idea at one moment filled him with rapture, and in the next sunk him into a state of despondency; for his bosom, which was the seat of the purest honour, sometimes entertained

entertained sentiments not altogether unlike Victoria's.

Some of his companions, who knew the ascendancy she had gained over him, rallied him on the felicity of seeing her so soon, and his intended visit to the castle, where they predicted an event of no less importance than their immediate union. Their good-humoured sallies served at least as a check upon his gravity; he saw the necessity of being perfectly himself, and in smiling cheerfulness he entered the ball-room; there he was very soon an object of general attention, and to the female part of the company, of general admiration, for he had never looked so captivating as now. The continual buz amongst those, his admirers, would not have let him remain ignorant of the notice he had attracted, had he even been blind to the frequent and involuntary glances directed towards him from some of the most beautiful eyes in the room.

Though

Though the rooms were by this time almost crowded, dancing had not yet commenced, and he proceeded to pay his respects to the duke of Silesia, who was standing chatting with another young officer, and apparently unmindful of the myriads of beautiful women promenading up and down before him.

Envy and vanity were Leopold's most striking characteristics; he possessed the advantage of a fine person, and that added to the splendour of his rank, he expected to see every class, every age and sex, kneel before him, imagining that those two recommendations were sufficient to command universal homage: over the few good qualities nature had implanted in him, a degree of ill-natured satire, which he never lost an opportunity of displaying, threw a shade that nearly obscured them. He regarded the other sex as baubles, made for the service or amusement of his own; and, wrapt in his personal charms,

charms, he regarded even the superior ones of woman with apathy, nay, often with contempt; and amongst his own sex, he was either unconscious of, or would not acknowledge a rival.

On De Willenberg's first entering the regiment, he experienced many signal proofs of the duke's favour; but soon that favour was transferred; the attentions that Theodore everywhere met, he viewed with an eye of jealousy and surprise, unwilling to see wherein he merited them; he had hoped his rank would secure him precedence wherever he went, and to do this the more effectually, he always took care to hint at De Willenberg's dependent state. He was foiled however in so unworthy an aim; and though his rank *did* admit him to the first circles, still was he almost everywhere an object of fear, from his satirical talents, and dislike, from the domineering air of tyranny his words and his actions always wore; few were unacquainted

quainted with those talents, for few indeed did he spare; but he now seemed to have selected Theodore, in particular, as a butt, on whom to exercise all the severity of which it was capable.

“Here comes that smooth-tongued flatterer, De Willenberg,” said the duke, with a sarcastic smile, seizing the arm of an officer who stood near him; “let us come and meet him, Werner: how he cringes and bows to all, while his words flow as sweet as honey from the virgin comb! mark what a fool those women make of him! see how he revels in their wanton smiles, and thinks them the very soul of love!”

Captain Haller, a young officer, whose amiable qualities were as conspicuous as the elegance of his person, was the one with whom the duke had been conversing, and he could not repress a smile of contempt as his highness walked away; so

unfavourable

unfavourable was the comparison to him, that he, for a moment, drew between the haughty, high-born Leopold, and the handsome and unassuming De Willenberg.

“And is it such a one,” thought he, “that would analyse the mind or the actions of another? Hypocrite! he would see Theodore in the very bosom of perdition. Is this the one who would point out the failings of another—one who knows not himself? what a pity that Nature should in vain have exerted her powers, to conceal a depraved heart by a fair exterior! He is as an ornament of coloured glass, made in resemblance of some rich and precious gem; its brilliant tint may at first deceive the eye, but look closer, and how soon do we espy the foil, some worthless stuff beneath!”

Such was Haller's mental soliloquy, when suddenly the subject of it again accosted

costed him, as he approached by the side of Theodore.

“Now, Haller,” said he, “confess that your mirror has played a treacherous part with you to-night; for myself, I shall never believe in one again. Look here, thou little twinkling star, and hide your diminished head; with all our vanity we must own ourselves at length surpassed; turn your eyes on De Willenberg, and then say what female, composed of flesh and blood, could withstand such a blaze of charms? not Diana herself, with all her prudish modesty; they would make the very devil reverence him.”

“That they would,” returned Haller, significantly, “and his three satellites, Envy, Hatred, and Malice.”

“I advise you, Haller, to be a satellite in some one else’s train, less likely to eclipse you,” said the disconcerted duke, petulantly; then, wishing to conceal his chagrin at the unexpected retort, he resumed—

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“De Willenberg, the bard should have announced you with—‘See the conquering hero comes!’ You look like the full-orbed moon, and we, poor fluttering creatures, round you, like so many little stars, impudently starting up, only to be dazzled by your brightness.”

“Or like a brilliant jewel beside an humble pebble, deriving a greater lustre from the contrast,” observed De Willenberg good-humouredly, and determined to rebuff him.

At the same moment, the names of the count and lady Victoria Herman were echoed through the room, and presently afterwards appeared, leaning on her father’s arm, our lovely heroine. As if by general impulse, all the company instantly fixed their eyes on her, for she looked almost perfection; envy itself could not withhold the admiration she merited; and even the duke of Silesia, the vain, arrogant, self-opinionated duke, who had hitherto

hitherto regarded woman as a being so vastly inferior to man, was struck with her incomparable beauty, and exclaimed to captain Haller, as he put his arm inside his, and forgetful of the captain's *jeu-d'esprit*, hurried him towards the count's party—"If mortals can assume the form of angels, there goes one on whom Heaven has bestowed that privilege."

"Your highness is caught at last," observed Haller, smiling at Leopold's enthusiasm; "that heart which so long boasted indifference to the whole sex, is at length vanquished, lost, irretrievably lost."

"By Jupiter it is!" answered the duke, "and lost to such advantage, that for worlds I would not redeem it: think you that my heart is composed of the same materials as my sword, or that I am an actual stoic or woman-hater? no, no, this enchantress has completely fascinated me—a conquest by no means inconsiderable; and if she is not Silesia's duchess before

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the expiration of three months, say I am not a man, a soldier, nor a lover."

"This indeed, duke, is most wonderful!" ejaculated Haller.

"Most strange, most wonderful, but yet most true, captain! I am seriously in love with her, and would almost give my dukedom for half-an-hour's conversation with her. But do my eyes deceive me? By Heaven, here she comes, with her father, and that every-body's man, De Willenberg, stalking beside them."

The ceremony of introduction past, Leopold fancied he had gained a complete triumph over De Willenberg, for Victoria chatted to him with all the easy familiarity that marks the woman of fashion; all his vivacity and wit, every fancied attraction he possessed, were called forth on this great occasion, for it was his intention that she should be as effectually captivated as he was himself.

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DE WILLENBERG.

The company were by this time forgotten by Victoria's affability into perfect forgetfulness of his engagement to the ball with another lady, resolved not to miss so fair an opportunity, as he deemed it, of obtaining the finest girl in the whole city of Warsaw for his partner, and exciting universal envy amongst the gentlemen, begged the count's permission to solicit that honour; but how great was his disappointment and vexation, on finding she was pre-engaged to De Willenberg!

Mortified and enraged at this supposed preference given to his rival, the duke coldly bowed, and withdrew to another part of the room, with haughty formality, to remind the countess de Winnerslaw of her promise to be his first partner; while Theodore gracefully approached the timid Victoria, and respectfully requesting her hand, he led her through the admiring throng

throng to whère they were about to commence quadrilles.

Notwithstanding all his efforts to be gay and entertaining, the duke could not hide his chagrin; in a thousand various ways he betrayed it; and it was with the greatest difficulty he could so far command himself, as to shew his fair partner the attentions that politeness demanded. He did not reflect that Victoria, having been already engaged to Theodore, could not, without an actual breach of decorum, dance immediately with him; that consideration was wholly forgotten in the importance attached to himself; and thus his pride received a wound not prone to heal very quickly.

Captain Haller saw the advantage De Willenberg had gained, for that Victoria really preferred the latter was obvious to his keen and penetrative eye; and being one  
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one of the many who could not esteem the duke, he determined to vex him still more, and to do it in such a manner that his intention could not be suspected.

“Count Herman’s attention has made De Willenberg even more than usually conspicuous to-night,” observed he, as he joined the duke at the end of the first dance.

“Pshaw! conspicuous!” sneered Leopold, “who would not stare at a daw in borrowed plumes? Yes, he is conspicuous enough; but give the devil his due, he has the merit of making himself so without the aid of his betters.”

“And yet, if all the peacocks round the poor daw were stripped of *their* plumes, your highness must own they would make rather a sorry sight,” retorted the captain: “but, seriously, that old Frenchwoman, the duchess de St. Clair, is over head and ears in love with him; she absolutely

wanted him to decline dancing, and to be her partner at the piquet-table."

"The piquet-table!" echoed the duke; "would she pay his reckoning if he lost? no, no; egad, he did wisely to run the risk of losing his heart before his money!—that's rather a scarce commodity with him."

"And woe be to the heart of whoever he dances with!" said Haller; "for he will never be the fool to marry a girl who may, like himself, have less money than wit."

"At that rate then he will either marry some thoughtless coquette with less wit than money, or never marry at all; what girl of sense would fling away her person and fortune on a coxcomb and a beggar? for he is scarcely removed from complete penury—a poor ensign, with nothing but the coat on his back, a tall figure, and a few canting compliments to recommend him."

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“ On this point I must undeceive your highness,” replied Haller, with warmth, and pleased to have so stung the invidious Leopold; “ De Willenberg is *not* a beggar, nor, I hope, ever will be; there is little doubt that through count Herman’s intercession, his father will be shortly reconciled to him; then will he be *far* removed from penury, nay, he will be well worthy even of the lovely lady Victoria for a wife.”

“ Through the count’s intercession!” repeated the duke, with a stare, and in a tone of incredulity; “ what mean you? you are surely not silly enough to believe that a man of Herman’s rank would trouble his head about the quarrels of his inferiors? but if *you* choose to believe it, there is no reason why *I* must——”

“ Be that as it may, every body knows that Theodore is on pretty good ground at the castle; it seems rather improbable that a handsome young man should be asked on a visit to an old Croesus, with a  
D 4 beautiful

beautiful young daughter, if little Cupid had not gone beforehand to solicit the honour for him."

"Monstrous absurdity!" cried the duke, instantly comprehending him, and distorting his features into a malicious grin; "is this *your* penetration, most sagacious and sensible captain Haller? Admirable policy! and so, forsooth, you are going to marry the discarded De Willenberg to the illustrious daughter of count Herman? excellently planned, but, alas, not so easily accomplished! her father is a man of sense, and by all accounts lady Victoria has not yet taken leave of her reason."

"There is no knowing what a girl in love *may* do," playfully answered the captain, unwilling to take him seriously; "if *she* does not take leave of her reason, *it* may perhaps take leave of *her*; and I fancy De Willenberg is the one it would make its exit with, that is, if *he* were to take his leave of her."

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“With *us*, Haller, it seems to be making a formal *congé* already ; so, in the name of common sense, let us recall it.”

“Well, I will now give your highness a very rational, a very plain, very concise, and very true piece of intelligence; if Theodore obtains his father’s pardon, his fortune will even exceed hers, and the whole neighbourhood whispers that she will then, *bonâ fide*, become his better half—his wife.”

“Come, come, you are *too* satirical on him,” said the duke, affecting to think this staunch friend of Theodore’s in jest; “this is unmercifully severe; but levity apart, I myself have serious intentions of making her my duchess—she is worthy of a royal coronet.”

“Which I am inclined to think she will not accept even from your highness.”

The quivering of his lip, the alternate flush and pallid hue of his countenance, for a moment betrayed Leopold’s indig-

nation; but his pride mastered it in time to elude the observation of Werner, who now came up, and tapping the captain on the shoulder—"Eh, Haller," said he, "is this the gallantry for which you are so renowned? standing here and looking as grave as a doctor, or a lawyer pocketing his fee, instead of leading some lovely nymph, on 'light fantastic toe,' through the 'mazy dance.' As for your highness, I only wonder to see you here at all—you generally prefer the *balls* in the billiard-room."

"The *balls* of a lady's eyes have made a bitter *hit* to-night, Werner; they have done more damage in this little field of infantry, than the fiercest balls that ever whizzed from a cannon."

"Bravissimo!" cried Werner; "this *Circe* has caught your highness also in her chains; we may expect another golden age if *you* are fallen in love: yonder stands the happy fair, and, no disparagement, or rather discouragement, to your highness,

highness, she has got a devilish handsome partner in De Willenberg; by-the-bye, the selfish fellow seems to have monopolized her altogether. But they are beginning to dance again; there are two or three spinsters expecting *you* at the top of the room, and if you do not ask them to be your partners, *they will* positively come and ask *you*."

"It will not be *ask* and *have* with them then; let them dance together and be damned," cried Leopold, out of all patience at this apparent combination of wit and raillery against him.

He moved off haughtily and peevishly, and flung himself on the first vacant seat, while the gay Werner and his friend, all liveliness and good-humour, smiled at having mortified the vanity of this petulant great man, and, with hearts devoid of care, joined their airy partners.

In silent sullen dignity the duke sat a considerable time, without condescending

to speak to any body, his eyes fixed intently on De Willenberg, with an expression of rancorous envy, until, the set being concluded, he saw him present his arm to Victoria, and lead her to a seat, where the count, who had been absent for some time, soon joined them.

“ Now, Victoria,” said his lordship, “ I will take care of you ; and meantime do you, Theodore, take my advice and pay your respects to the dowager de St. Clair directly ; she is almost out of patience at your not coming to chat with her before.”

“ Indeed, my lord, I scarcely saw her grace ; and if lady Victoria had arrived a little sooner, I verily believe I should not have seen any body else.”

Victoria blushed ; and the count smiling, directed him to the card-room—“ You will there find the avaricious old dame,” continued he ; “ she fastened me to the table so unmercifully long, winning and  
laughing

laughing all the while, that had not the duchesse de Beauflour very good-naturedly got into a passion at losing, and, *sans cérémonie*, flung down her cards hastily, I think she would have kept me there all night."

"Flung down her cards?" exclaimed Victoria, shocked at such a circumstance; "can it be possible that her grace committed so gross an outrage on politeness and decorum?"

"My dear girl," said the count, "decorum was one of the rigid laws of the old school—the dullest of all dull things; but such stale tenets are now obsolete amongst our modern fashionables, who more judiciously conceive good breeding to consist in elegant assurance and refined rudeness."

"Then indeed," said Victoria, "I do not wish to be classed with the *well-bred* ladies of the present day. Alas!" thought she, "if this be the world I am entering, would I had remained secluded in  
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in the sacred and revered abode of my infancy! far preferable had its solitude been to the vicious gaieties of fashionable life, more congenial to me the society of its amiable sisterhood, than of those new modellers of manners and morals, those *refiners* of sense and decency I am here doomed to meet; surely, if these two are thus grossly perverted, if fashion thus sanctions indecency and folly, it will also sanction falsehood and deceit."

An involuntary sigh escaped her as she made these reflections; she half started, for she perceived it had instantly been caught by the attentive ear of De Willenberg, who, fearful, he scarce knew why, of the count's observation, hastily took his leave for a while, and proceeded to pay his devoirs to the matrons in the card-room.

Ere he was out of sight, the duke, who had watched anxiously the moment of being seen by him, resumed an air of cheerfulness,

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DE WILLENBERG.

cheerfulness, sprang from his seat over to Victoria, and, with the most irresistible and fascinating elegance of manner he could put on, requested her to do him the honour of dancing the court minuet with him.

Dancing was an accomplishment in which his highness particularly excelled, and in this he knew he could display his graceful figure to the highest advantage, which indeed he never lost an opportunity of doing; but he was now more stimulated by the hope of exciting envy in De Willenberg at the praises he anticipated, as well as of raising his jealousy by employing all his allurements to engross Victoria's attention, well knowing that Theodore's sentiments, with regard to her, were exactly similar to his own. His heart throbbed quickly with exultation at this idea, and lent much of its animation to his eyes, which sparkled with an unusual degree of brilliancy.

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Our heroine was by no means prepossessed in the duke's favour, but she could not, consistent with *her* ideas of politeness, refuse to dance with him, and, with her father's approbation, she gave him her hand.

As he had expected, bursts of applause and admiration, from all sides, followed their performnace of the minuet; but notwithstanding this gratification to his vanity, still he was not satisfied; for De Wilenberg had not witnessed it, nor seen him lead Victoria down the room triumphantly as his partner. Oh! had he but been present, had he seen the bewitching gracefulness of her every step, as she moved through the minuet, while he fancied she looked a thousand times more lovely than in the preceding dances! surely, he thought, it would have been a victory over his presumptuous rival, who would then have felt and acknowledged his own inferiority, and shrunk from the illustrious Victoria,

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as detected vice recoils from the glance of virtue. In vain, however, he sought an opportunity of displaying his supposed triumph, and numerous acts of gallantry : to Victoria his attention was fulsome and displeasing ; and as soon as etiquette permitted, she rejoined her father, hoping his highness would leave her, and seek a partner more calculated for him, and to whom his compliments and assiduities might be less irksome ; but as he thought quite differently of himself, and was not at all of opinion that he could find a more delightful companion, or that *she* could wish for one more so, he remained beside her while they promenaded up and down the room.

At length Theodore again made his appearance ; Victoria felt pleased at his return, and tried to persuade herself that she was so merely because he might, in some measure, divert the duke's attention from her ; at the same moment they were proceeding

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ing to sit down, and Leopold stopped to speak to Werner, who had accosted him.

Theodore now approached, and Victoria hoped he would take the vacant seat beside her father, and thus exclude the duke; but she was disappointed; the latter seeing him coming towards them, and without appearing to observe him, unceremoniously quitted Werner, and darted into the seat ere De Willenberg had reached them.

Now, Victoria, what were the sensations that filled thy gentle bosom? or why, in reality, didst thou wish that De Willenberg, instead of the royal Leopold, had occupied a place so near thee? Ask thy young and susceptible heart, and it will tell thee what thou art not yet aware of; surely thou hast found thy kindred soul in the amiable De Willenberg. Like thine own indeed is his—pure and exalted!

soon

soon will thy feelings ripen into love—nay, start not at the sound—thou mayest argue and reason with thyself, and say—“ I may *esteem* Theodore, for he is every thing that deserves esteem; but wherefore should I *love* him?” yet in defiance of all thy reasoning, still wilt thou love him, for he is also every thing that deserves thy love.

De Willenberg could not help feeling hurt at the duke's pointed rudeness, nor was Victoria less so, though more able to conceal it; his eyes met hers for a moment, and then turning a look of contempt on Leopold, after a few commonplace observations addressed to the count, he passed on. No offence from an individual ever made him forgetful of the politeness due to others; and however piqued at the conduct of the duke, and disappointed at being thus separated from Victoria, he chatted and laughed with all his acquaintances, with the same engaging affability and liveliness that always characterized him.

Report

Report had, ere now, given to Victoria an outline of the duke's general character, but his disposition had this night so completely developed itself, that, divesting him of the pomp and dignities of rank, and viewing him merely as a man, she remembered nobody whom she thought it would be so difficult to esteem or respect. How little then did the unconscious Leopold think, what an impossibility it would be to inspire her with a sentiment bearing the remotest affinity to love!

She was extremely disconcerted by the repulse he had given De Willenberg, and that tended still more to prejudice her against him; but for Theodore's sake she studiously avoided every thing that might excite further envy or enmity towards him in the bosom of Leopold, who, with almost all the assiduity of a professed lover, continued to follow her for the remainder of the evening.

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To her infinite satisfaction she at length heard her father's carriage announced, and, with grave and formal politeness, wishing his highness good-night, she was assisted to enter it by De Willenberg, to whom the count, cordially shaking hands with him, gave a pressing invitation to dine at the castle next day, and on the one succeeding to that, he was to consider it his home for some months.

CHAP.

## CHAPTER III.

—————A matchless pair,  
With equal virtue formed, and equal grace.

THOMSON.

WITH all the solicitude of a fond parent, the count's eyes had pursued Victoria's every step during the evening, while she remained within their reach. To the protection of few besides De Willenberg would he have entrusted her; yet one of those few was the duke of Silesia, under whose care he felt no reluctance in leaving her several times, when politeness required his society and attendance elsewhere. He was, however, one of those who only superficially knew the duke, whose fulsome compliments and displeasing attentions to our heroine were so managed as to pass unobserved

unobserved by him; and Victoria, while she felt pained and embarrassed by them, instead of ungenerously enjoying the advantage they gave her over every other female present, was too polite to shew resentment, and too tenacious of her beloved father's tranquillity to mention them.

Leopold had received his early education in a remote part of Germany, under a father of the Catholic church, who was not only a slave to every bigotry and prejudice that had existed for some preceding centuries, but also a man of the most depraved and diabolical principles. He was competent to the task of instructing his royal pupil merely so far as regarded the exterior accomplishments he was expected to possess: in outward appearance he was all he wished—fascinating and imposing; but within all was deep, dark, and designing; and according to his own, did this *holy* man model the mind and the heart of the unfortunate Leopold, who too  
well

well imbibed his precepts, and followed his doctrines.

To mask the genuine feelings of the heart, was one of the first lessons fatally taught him; to study the external graces of a courtier and a man of fashion—to appear amiable, without possessing in reality an amiable quality, the next; and thus progressively the duke became the insinuating, artful, polished hypocrite he has been drawn.

On their way home, the count, amongst other topics, requested his daughter's opinion of his highness, and, with her accustomed sweetness and amiability, she commented on his good qualities; for a few good ones he did possess, without suffering herself for a moment to suggest his bad and generally more striking ones. Her usual vivacity enlivened her not now; she was silent and thoughtful; and her father, whose discernment soon satisfied him

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as to the cause, allowed her to indulge in her pensiveness during much of the latter part of their journey.

In the solitude of her apartment she strove to account for the uneasy change which a few short hours had produced in her. For the first time in her life, her peace of mind was disturbed; and now too, for the first time, she dared to acknowledge to herself that De Willenberg was the author, the unconscious author, of her disquietude. Thus secure from observation, she ventured to examine the state of her heart, and to give way to reflections she had hitherto dreaded to encourage. With however partial an eye she had till now viewed Theodore, she thought she had never before this night seen him to such advantage. It appeared as if he had kept a host of his attractions in reserve, to besiege at once that heart he had been so long slowly undermining, and she was obliged to confess the victory he

had gained, for too well she understood the nature of her feelings not to acknowledge that she loved him.

This conviction was not chilled by any apprehension that her love was unrequited, for though De Willenberg had been seldom in her society, and then had never suffered his lips to utter a word that could be directly construed into an expression of affection for her, yet his general deportment so plainly evinced that she was an object of peculiar interest to him, his kindest attentions being almost undividedly to her, and his manner altogether so completely spoke the language of the heart, and so unequivocally betrayed his attachment to her, that with the discernment she possessed, it was impossible for her to be mistaken as to the nature of his sentiments.

Yet while she felt pleased at being beloved by the amiable being on whom she had

had placed her own pure affections, that pleasure was not without alloy. She knew the peculiarity of De Willenberg's situation, the circumscribed state of his finances, and how painfully he was circumstanced with regard to his father; she knew that the count loved him with tenderness almost paternal, had argued against the cruelty of that father, and even written a most eloquent and feeling letter, in the hope of reinstating Theodore in his favour—an act which the latter was yet ignorant of. But all this she deemed as merely proceeding from an impulse of generosity and benevolence in the count, who, she firmly believed, would never sanction any encroachment upon that generosity, by allowing even this, his favourite, to address her as a lover. He had, it is true, permitted her to reject many offers which were in several respects eligible and advantageous, as well as many of no advantage at all; but she was not hence to conclude that his philanthropy, or his partiality,

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lity, would lead him to bestow herself, the heiress of his illustrious house, on the untitled Theodore, while he could, through an act at least of obedience, if not of choice, on her part, ally himself to some of the most distinguished families under the crown.

The mind of De Willenberg was not less painfully agitated. From the hour he had first seen Victoria, he had viewed no other woman with sensations so delightful to him, and her loveliness increasing with her years, he soon became convinced that he could be happy with no other as a wife. His bosom young and glowing with enthusiasm, he gave way for a while to all the raptures this idea inspired, anticipating every joy known to mortals; but reason soon stepped forward as a check to his ardour, and he was obliged, however reluctantly, to listen to it. He contemplated himself as a being almost unfriended and alone in the world, unfeelingly discarded  
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by the only one on whom nature had given him a claim for protection and support—by his father, and without seeing any probability of his being reconciled to him.

M. de Willenberg had now ceased to notice his pecuniary or any other wants, and even to write to him upon any subject, so that he was left entirely depending on his pay for subsistence. He no longer cherished a hope of assistance from his father; and thus destitute of the luxuries, and many of the necessaries of life, and consequently of ability to support a wife, his soul sickened at the thought that Victoria, she who had gained his warmest affections, never could be his. He shrunk from the debasing idea of entailing poverty and misery on the woman he loved, for he did not think it probable that her father would countenance her, were she to sacrifice her prospects of aggrandizement to what might be deemed an unworthy passion; and ever noble and magnanimous, he

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thought

thought not of stooping to the humiliation of soliciting her hand in his present circumstances, and the possible mortification of being repulsed. To know even that she felt a spark of affection for him, would have been felicity almost unutterable; but situated as he now was, every principle of honour equally forbade his seeking such a knowledge, or avowing his own sentiments, aware how distressing it would be to all parties; he therefore resolved, in his visit to the castle, to be so circumspect and watchful over his words and actions, that the state of his mind could not possibly be suspected.

Actuated by these conscientious feelings and scruples of delicacy, he was at first almost led to excuse himself from accepting the count's invitation; but when he considered, that to decline it would be to inflict unnecessary pain upon himself, and anticipated, in going, what delightful days he should spend in the society of  
Victoria,

Victoria, all his irresolution vanished, and he gave the promise required of him.

In pursuance of that promise, he arrived punctually at the appointed time, and was agreeably surprised to find the countess Bertonville at the castle, where she had come to remain during the summer.

Madame Bertonville was the youngest sister of count Herman, and had, at a very early age, married a French nobleman, then on a visit at the court of Warsaw, to whom she was most fervently attached. Her husband, who adored her, left not a wish of her generous heart ungratified; he did every thing to deserve the affection he had conciliated, and for a while their felicity and happiness were all that sublunary happiness could be expected to be; they had almost fancied it perfect, when fate determined to undeceive them; with one blow effectually un-

dermined it, and robbed her, by a sudden death, of the idol of her heart for ever.

Her irreparable loss overwhelmed this amiable woman in grief for a long time inconsolable, and not all the splendour and opulence with which her husband's provident care left her surrounded, could beguile her of her sorrow, or afford her a moment's gratification.

For some months she mourned uninterrupted the death of one so dear to her, until the kind admonitions of her friends, representing the duties she owed to herself and her afflicted family, but, above all, the duty of submission to the will of the All-wise Director of events, aroused her from her lethargic grief, and a sense of the culpability of indulging it to such excess, determined her to rally all her powers to subdue it.

She returned to the world once more,  
and,

and, with pious resignation, sought the aid of society to restore her to herself. She became, in a short time, perfectly tranquil and resigned ; her grief was mellowed into a sort of pleasing pensiveness, and those around her, taking advantage of her natural sweetness and docility of temper, used every exertion, and at length brought her to a degree of cheerfulness they could hardly have expected.

The fruit of her marriage was a lovely boy, whose education, requiring much of her time and attention, would alone have divested her sorrow of its poignancy. He was the exact counterpart of his father, in the excellence of his disposition, and the fine expression of his features, which rendered him doubly dear to his idolizing mother, who was fully qualified for the interesting task of training his infant mind, and modelling it to make him worthy of the noble name he bore.

In this pleasing occupation passed many months after her seclusion, and under the tuition of a mother, equally loving and beloved, the little Henri rapidly improved in his juvenile studies; he was the darling of count Herman, his uncle, whose favourite sister, madame Bertonville having ever been, she had now, at his particular request, come to enjoy the beautiful summer season at Herman Castle, accompanied by her little boy.

She was a woman of superior education and accomplishments; her mind was enriched with a fund of literary and general knowledge, which rendered her everywhere a desirable companion; and such was her happy versatility of talent, that to the young, the old, the gay, and the serious, her conversation was equally a source of pleasure and information.

Her features were not critically beautiful, but there was in them a sweet expression

sion of mildness and benignity, that made her much more interesting than perfect beauty could have done. Something like sadness occasionally stole over them; but too generous to throw a gloom over the joys of others, by indulging melancholy, she instantly tried to recollect something to cheer her, and resumed her usual animated smile.

Theodore, in whose esteem she had always ranked high, and who had spent many happy hours beneath her hospitable roof, was much gratified at meeting her; and his little playfellow, as he termed Henri, he embraced with fraternal affection.

With the arrival of her friends Victoria's cheerfulness returned, and with genuine hospitality the count welcomed this addition to the members of his now happy house. The social party were not a little surprised, when an attendant entered to

E 6                      announce

announce a new visitor—no less a personage than the duke of Silesia, who presently entered the drawing-room, arrayed in smiles of the most condescending politeness:

A visit from this haughty prince was a circumstance so unusual, and he was so unaccustomed to bend from his stateliness into any thing like familiarity, that it at first occasioned much amazement and conjecture as to the purport of it.—“He came,” he said, “to pay his respects, and inquire how they had sustained the fatigues of the late ball?”

However unfathomable to them was the cause, they immediately perceived that a complete metamorphosis had taken place in him. He had thrown aside all his wonted reserve—he was no longer the proud, silent, repulsive Leopold, whose very nod hitherto had appeared almost too great an honour for any body beneath him in rank  
to

to expect—he was now all life, cheerfulness, and affability. Even to De Wil- lenberg, the one whom from his inmost soul he hated, his deportment was changed to an appearance of the most friendly warmth, which the latter could by no means ac- count for. To the count and madame Bertonville his conversation was chiefly directed; it was lively, intelligent, and full of anecdote, so that they very soon began to think him a most agreeable ad- dition to their society.

Three hours passed away thus pleasant- ly, and, to their surprise, though his car- riage and horses had stood all the time at the portal, he yet evinced no inclination to depart, nor indeed did they form a wish that he should.

An elegant repast was served up, of which he slightly partook; and afterwards, without much hesitation, he accepted an invitation to dine and spend the remain-  
der

der of the day with them: his equipage and attendants he therefore sent back to Warsaw, with orders to come for him at a late hour in the evening; and then, with vivacity, joined the amusements that preceded the hour for dinner.

His playful gaiety soon established him in the good graces of Henri Bertonville, whom, with a conciliating smile, he took upon his knee, and caressed. The star, the sword, and other military insignia, that the duke wore, particularly attracted Henri's notice, who, as he admired it, eagerly declared to the countess, his mother, that he would be an officer, and wear a star and a sword also.

“So you shall, my pretty boy,” said the duke, kissing his rosy cheek, “and, with your mother's permission, I will present you with a sword, when you are old enough to wield it, and a commission into the bargain, to give you an opportunity  
of

of wielding it honourably. Remember this my promise to your son, madame Bertonville," continued he, addressing the countess; "allow me the gratification of providing for him in the noble profession of arms, to which, I foresee, he will one day be a bright ornament; he has the very soul of a hero, and, under my auspices, he shall at some future period fight the battles of his king and country, and perpetuate the glories that devolved to him from his illustrious father: say then that the interesting charge of directing his military career shall be mine."

The inadvertent mention of her husband had touched upon a chord that vibrated most painfully through the countess's whole frame; but quickly recovering herself, she gracefully expressed her gratitude for the duke's kind offer, and, to the infinite joy of her son, promised, that if such were his wish on attaining the  
the

the age of manhood, it should be complied with.

This appeared to them, and especially to madame Bertonville, the impulse of a generous heart; and while the enraptured Henri threw his arms familiarly round his neck to kiss him for it, he rose considerably in the opinion of the others, who believed his natural disposition to be mingled with much liberality.

It was now proposed by De Willenberg that they should proceed to the music-room, Victoria having, in the morning, promised to sing one of his favourite songs for him.

She was a finished performer on the harp; and in her voice was united, to all the beautiful melody and simplicity of nature, every embellishment that it required from art. It had been cultivated  
by

by one of the most eminent masters, and brought almost to perfection ; but though thus capable, she felt a degree of reluctance at the idea of displaying her talents before a stranger, as if exacting from every body the applause they deserved. She was, however, far superior to the disgusting affectation that degrades so many of her sex—she did not, like others, drawl out—“ She was sure they flattered her ; indeed she could hardly sing a note ! she had caught a bad cold, and they must excuse her—indeed they must !” To such despicable traps for praise and for flattery, she had never descended ; and now convinced that her compliance would be really gratifying to her friends, she felt that it would be a mark of ridiculous vanity to refuse.

Several musical instruments were ranged round the room, on each of which she was a proficient ; but, at the general request, she took her seat at the harp.  
With

With uncommon rapidity and gracefulness, she swept the strings through the symphony of a beautiful song she was about to commence; such sweet—such delicious sounds as they sent forth, beneath her magic touch, thrilled through every bosom; and even, ere her voice had given additional charms to them, her auditors were almost in raptures. Her rapid execution now changed to a slow movement, but equally beautiful; it commanded universal silence, for all were eager for the moment of hearing her own melodious notes. The first few bars were simple and pathetic, and sung with all the exquisite feeling and judgment they required. From slow, the time gradually changed to a lively measure, till her full and sonorous voice burst upon their delighted ears in all the lofty grandeur of bravura.

All the encomiums their admiration of this fine performance dictated, were lavished on Victoria.

Henri,

Henri, who had been standing beside her, gazing on her lovely features while she sung, with an expression of infinite satisfaction, flung his arms round her neck the moment she had finished, and kissed her several times.—“ Oh, cousin Victoria !” he cried, “ I love you now better than ever I did before ! you sang so very, very sweetly, and you look so handsome, and so——”

“ Begone, you little flatterer !” she interrupted, patting him on the head with the leaves of some music, and blushing deeply.

“ I am sure I said nothing but the truth,” he provokingly continued, springing over and catching hold of De Willenberg’s arm—“ did I, Theodore ? now look at her, and tell me if I did ?”

“ Nothing but truth could issue from your lips,” said De Willenberg, instantly averting his eyes, which had already been fixed on Victoria, and his fine complexion reddening to a perfect carnation hue.

“ There,

“There, cousin!” exclaimed Henri, exultingly; “I knew he would say so, for I have often before heard him say it of you to mamma; and don’t you love her, too, as well as I do, in your heart, Theodore?”

“Has *your* young heart been so soon taught to love?” asked Theodore, endeavouring to smile, but still more disconcerted than before.

“Indeed it has, for I love mamma and cousin Victoria, and I love you all, and therefore you must all love me,” he replied, running across the room, and jumping into count Herman’s lap; then suddenly quitting him, he snatched the duke of Silesia’s hand.—“Now tell me, duke, who, in this room, do *you* love best?” said he.

“Yourself, to be sure, my pretty prattler,” answered Leopold, and at the same moment raising his eyes, they encountered those of Victoria, who, feeling an unpleasant sensation at his momentary but ardent gaze, turned to madame Bertonville, and requested

requested her to play a favourite concerto on the harpsichord.

The countess, perceiving her embarrassment, instantly complied ; and, to our heroine's infinite gratification, drew for a while the general attention to herself. The piece she undertook was a very difficult composition, but her powers were fully equal to it ; and she continued thus to surprise and delight them, until a servant entered to summon them to dinner.

“ Whom do you love best now ? ” demanded Henri, again taking Theodore's hand, to accompany him to the dining-room ; “ my mamma, or cousin Victoria ? ”

“ You would be jealous if I were to say your mamma ; so you must guess this matter,” said Theodore, with more presence of mind than before, and not a little anxious to parry off such embarrassing questions.

“ Come hither, you teasing little urchin,  
and

and sit beside me," said the count, seeing that Theodore was rather confused, and wishing to relieve him. But Henri was not to be put off; he would have a direct answer, and the blushing De Willenberg was obliged to falter out that he loved Victoria best.

That our heroine felt the truth of this, was evident in her manner.

The duke seemed to know what was passing in her bosom, and forgetting, for a moment, his new character, he turned a dark and malignant scowl on De Willenberg, who well understood the feelings that prompted it, but quickly turned away his eyes, and introduced a new topic for conversation, to prevent its being observed by the rest.

Cheerfulness, hospitality, and elegance, were now the characteristics of the festive board; but as soon as etiquette permitted,  
Victoria

Victoria withdrew, with her aunt and Henri, to the drawing-room; the former glad to escape from Leopold's frequent glances, and the awkward situation in which Henri's innocent loquacity had placed her, with regard to De Willenberg, of whose attachment to her she had now had, indeed, an unequivocal proof. She would have chidden the artless boy, but that to notice such a thing seriously, would have been to disclose at once a secret, which she trusted her aunt had no suspicion of—the state of her heart—a secret which she thought prudence and delicacy forbade her to reveal.

Although the duke had to-day been the life of the party, she could not conquer the prejudice his unamiable conduct on the night of the ball had created against him; nor had she so little penetration, as not to comprehend what he meant she should in his attentions to her. Had ambition been an inmate of her breast,  
here

here surely was a bait which it would eagerly have grasped; but Victoria was one of the sensible part of her sex, and she knew that with the man she did not esteem, she certainly could not be happy. A few circumstances, it was true, inclined her to a more favourable opinion of him than his actions might have warranted; but were he even as amiable as he might be the reverse, the heart he sought was already disposed of; or had it been disengaged, it never could be his.

However gratifying to her vanity such attentions might be from a man of his rank, she revolted at the idea of countenancing them, and determined, should they put on a more serious appearance, immediately to apprise her father of it. These ideas of him she did not suffer herself to betray to the countess, whom, it was easy to perceive, his politeness had biassed in his favour; and in the esteem of so excellent a woman as madame Bertonville,  
Victoria

Victoria was too liberal to think of attempting to degrade him.

They were soon joined by the gentlemen; and by the time the usual repast of coffee and fruits was ended, the day was rapidly drawing to a close.

To a resplendent and auspicious sunset, promising another day equally fine, succeeded the calm and pleasing grey of twilight. The scene from the window was truly picturesque: the castle, being on an eminence, commanded a very extensive prospect: the gradually-parting trees formed a long and shady avenue in front, at the extremity of which the waters of the Vistula flowed in tranquil grandeur; the beautiful shrubs and odoriferous flowers that adorned its banks seeming to smile on its unruffled course, like happy subjects smiling in sweet contentment, under the peaceful reign of a great and virtuous monarch.

On one side, the eye slowly descended a slope of thick and variously-tinted foliage, which appeared to lose itself, by degrees, in the vast sheet of water beyond—on the other, a chain of stupendous rocks rose majestically over the summits of the far-stretching woods, inspiring sensations of admiration and awe; a few projecting cliffs, more accessible, and of comparatively-small dimensions, afforded ascent to the goats, and other wild animals, that browsed on the scanty herbage.

At this hour of silence, all nature around seemed slumbering; not a sound disturbed the serenity in which it reposed; and as De Willenberg and Victoria approached the window, a lucid cloud, rapidly passing away, unveiled the glorious luminary of night, whose mild and equal lustre, falling in one uniform stream of light over the whole landscape, suddenly made a full display of some of creation's loveliest works, like a guardian angel drawing

ing aside night's sombre curtain, to shew the sweet and tranquil slumbers of innocence and beauty.

"I move for a moonlight ramble along the river-side," said madame Bertonville, tapping Victoria on the shoulder; "I am this evening, most appropriately, of a sentimental turn—so what say you?"

"I second the motion," said Theodore, promptly.

"And I will support it," answered Victoria.

"But *I*, as chairman, put a negative on it," objected the count; "the evening air might give you cold; and moreover, Matilda, you and your supporter shall pay a fine, by-and-by, for proposing it, of a duet each, with that military mad-cap, Theodore. Ay, ay, you may smile, but remember my protest is entered against your going out."

"But your protest is overruled, my lord, by a strong majority," observed the

duke, taking Henri's hand, and advancing towards the ladies—" what says count Bertonville? do you vote for or against a walk?"

" I should like a walk very much," replied Henri; " but then, you know, it would be unkind to leave poor uncle alone; and, besides, he is now weaker, so I must take his part."

" Very well, my hopeful cousin!" sighed Victoria; " I wonder who will vote against us next."

" A vote of thanks to him from you all," said the count; " he has gained me over to your party."

" I will give you a kiss now for saying so, my dear good father," said Victoria, running over, and performing her promise.

" Bribery and corruption!" exclaimed his lordship, after affectionately receiving her as affectionate embrace; " this is the way you always cajole me, you artful sorceress; but go, muffle yourself up; and do you, good madame Bertonville, do the same; after which,

which, I will even accompany you on your excursion."

All were soon in readiness; and the duke, having anxiously watched the opportunity, proffered his arm to the half-angry Victoria, who, of course, could not decline it.

Theodore, secretly chagrined, but too polite to let it be perceived, gave his to madame Bertonville; and the count taking the hand of his little favourite, they set out.

To an attentive observer, Leopold's exultation would have been visible; his efforts to make himself an agreeable companion now surpassed all his former ones, and for a while succeeded.

"Though who," thought our heroine, "would not have preferred De Willenberg, even in his dullest moments?"

The duke's conversation and remarks

were certainly lively and well-turned; but that liveliness was not the spontaneous effusion of nature; it wanted that genuine air of good-humour that springs only from the heart; yet she listened with complaisance, because she saw he wished to amuse her. He frequently stopped to admire some interesting object. His pace, by degrees, became tediously slow, till at length, by his never-failing art of manœuvring, he contrived to let the rest of the party distance him and his fair companion to a considerable length.

Victoria was not affectedly prudish, nor unreasonably fastidious; but now his remarks began gradually to change, from the subject of the surrounding scenery, to irksome and disgusting flattery towards herself. She at first repelled it with all her natural gentleness and sweetness of temper; but finding that her forbearance only tended to augment the evil, and that he proceeded with more courage, her indignant

dignant feelings gave to her looks and words such an expression of resentment as he could not mistake.

As her father's guest—as the brother of a sovereign, whose virtues every one revered—and as the one who could prove either a powerful friend, or a powerful foe, to De Willenberg, she had determined that nothing short of actual rudeness should compel her to an open breach with him.

The policy of his deep-laid scheme now alarmed him, with the suggestion that he had perhaps ventured too far in his adulation, and he stopped as abruptly as he could, without appearing to be conscious of any impropriety. Still our heroine felt uncomfortable—she leaned on his arm, but her movements and her voice were tremulous.

He became more reserved, and respect-  
F 4 fully

fully polite; but she could not conquer her embarrassment; and in a soft tone of timidity, she entreated that they might hurry on, and join the others.

To do so would be to frustrate completely his motive for seeking this interview, and end at once all chance and opportunity of making known to her the passion with which she had inspired him. —“ They have so far outstripped us,” said he, “ and are still not walking, but running, I might say, at such an immeasurable rate, that unless you are a second Atalanta, you cannot possibly overtake them—besides, lady Victoria, you tremble—you seem to be indisposed, and walking very quickly might agitate you too much.”

“ Oh, not at all!” she hastily replied; “ I am well—quite well, and my father and madame Bertonville may perhaps be uneasy about me.”

“ Uneasy about you!” reiterated the duke; “ do they not know you are with  
*me?*”

*me* ? while you are under *my* care, neither they nor *you*, lovely Victoria, have any thing to fear !”

This unguarded speech again increased her uneasiness ; she saw that a full declaration of love hung upon his tongue, which his lips burned to give utterance to, but she strove to keep within the bounds of politeness.—“ Your highness misconceives me,” she faltered ; “ I am not afraid, or—or——but you know my father and the countess will wonder—that is, they will think we are treating them very badly, in letting them go on so very far without us.”

“ They are not alone,” said Leopold—“ they cannot want *us*. My lord, your father, is perfectly pleased with the prattling partner of *his* walk ; and,” continued he, in a tone of ungovernable and ill-natured sarcasm, “ I will answer for it, the countess Bertonville is not less charmed with *hers*. De Willenberg seems to possess the peculiar—the superhuman power of

F 5

of

of fascinating every female he addresses— I mean, when his own interest prompts him to exert that power. There are a few young ladies now in the metropolis, over whose susceptible hearts he has not exerted them in vain; and, from what I can learn, his exertions will shortly be rewarded by one of them.”

The motive of this assertion was so obvious as entirely to defeat his purpose; and Victoria half recoiled from him, disgusted at his illiberality, offended at his freedom towards her, his evident suspicion of her partiality to Theodore—a suspicion so unhesitatingly and indelicately betrayed—and his equally apparent supposition, that this intelligence would probably give her pain, and perhaps gain her affections for himself.

The foremost party had, by this time, reached the margin of the river, and were contemplating the moon, as it sailed through

through the clear expanse of ether, reflected on the polished surface of the water.

Surprised at the delay of Victoria and her *chaperon*, madame Bertonville turned round, and called to them to come on.

Never had our heroine felt more obliged to her aunt than now ; she was almost in the very act of bounding away from the duke, when recollecting, that not even his ill nature could sanction such a breach of good breeding in her, she checked herself, and still leaning on his arm, walked on along with him.

Unwilling to make her father or the countess uneasy, she rallied up her spirits, and appeared tolerably cheerful, by the time she joined them. She yet knew not how to get rid of the duke with a good grace, though determined to do it by some means ; and while her eyes were intently fixed, apparently in admiration of some

F 6

object

object that had attracted the attention of the rest, her thoughts were busily employed, devising a plan by which she might, without seeming intentionally to do it, transfer him to the countess, into whose ear, she knew, he dared not breathe a syllable of such discourse as he had teased and annoyed her with; and it will easily be believed that the hope of De Willenberg's offering her his arm did not a little influence her. Every thing seemed to favour her wish; nature had formed a sort of recess in one of the rocks, where some fishermen, residing in the vicinity of the river, had hewn a rude bench, and here count Herman and Henri were now seated.

As Victoria and the duke approached, she gently withdrew her arm from his, both being about to sit down. Leopold had placed himself on one side of her father, and she was just moving towards the other, when, at that instant, De Willenberg and the countess came up.

“Theodore,”

“Theodore,” said the latter, “I will exempt you from the penance of escorting an old married woman like me, and give you a more suitable companion; so now muster up all your gallantry, and take charge of Victoria; she will, I am sure, with pleasure superintend the efforts of your pencil, in sketching the enchanting scene, from the little cliff yonder, which you expressed such a wish to make a drawing of—will you not, my love?”

“Most certainly I will, my dear aunt,” replied our heroine, with such unaffected sweetness and sincerity, as almost revealed the pleasure she *did* feel in being about to accompany him, and being thus freed from the impertinent compliments of the duke.—“Should any suggestion of mine appear useful, I will venture my opinion, if he permits me; but I am much afraid that want of practice has blunted the talent I once had for drawing.”

“The talents with which nature has  
gifted

gifted you, defy the power of circumstances to blunt them," said Theodore, softly, his heart bounding joyfully, as he drew her arm inside his.

"Do not thus overrate them, or you may find yourself deceived," playfully rebuffed Victoria; "appearances, you know, are often deceitful."

"The countenance is generally the mind's best index; and, surely, if such a one as *yours* could be a mask for deceit, heaven itself must be fallacious!" replied De Willenberg, and instantly his cheeks reddened with confusion, at his having suffered himself to say so much.

"I protest," said the lively madame Bertonville, who had heard this unequivocal proof of his admiration of Victoria, and whose sincere wish it was that it should be reciprocal—"I protest you have learned the art of flattering a lady's good opinion of herself with surprising facility and promptitude! I am sure, during the  
whole

DE WILLENBERG.

whole time of your walk with me, you did not say one handsome thing to me, more than common politeness required."

"Nay, countess, you are too premature; you judge too harshly," articulated the duke, with a degree of asperity he could not restrain—"De Willenberg is never deficient; he is notorious for saying more to every female than politeness requires."

"I never say more than—and to some people, not all that *truth* requires," Theodore quickly retorted, and darting a look of contempt at the disconcerted duke, he turned to the countess, to request the loan of her pencil.

Only for a moment did Leopold's self-possession forsake him; his pride, stung to the quick by Victoria's now-discovered reluctance to his society, and malignantly jealous of her accompanying De Willenberg, he resolved to vent his spleen in such a way as to annoy them both effectually, without the appearance of any intention to do so.—"In the name of justice to us all, De

De Wilkenberg," said he, " I must vote against your monopolizing lady Victoria, unless it is her ladyship's *wish* to go with you, and superintend your interesting occupation ; if so, I am silent."

" I always wish to oblige my friends," observed Victoria, dryly.

" Your highness should have proposed a vote against *monopoly* before we left the castle," returned Theodore, emphatically ; " but it is now too late."

" Bless me !" ejaculated Leopold, forcing a reluctant smile into his countenance, " how could I be so very thoughtless ? why, lady Victoria will make the most beautiful and the most prominent object in the whole picture."

" An admirable idea !" exclaimed the count. " Now, Theodore, I will have you draw Victoria, in front of the landscape, as the good genius of the place, and yourself as—as——"

" The *evil* genius, in the *background*, of course, my lord, if you wish for a picturesque

resque scene!" suggested the duke, still wearing a smile, which he hoped all, but the object of his malice, would mistake for the smile of good humour.

His words were too pointed to be misunderstood by Theodore, in whose bosom a storm was fast gathering; which madame Bertonville perceiving, and with her usual goodness of heart, wishing to avert—"Indeed, Theodore," said she, "it shall be as his highness says—you and Victoria are the presiding deities here to-night, and you surely would not be so ungallant as to give the part of the evil genius to a fair lady."

"It is a part, madame, she could ill perform, and for her sake I will try to sustain it," answered Theodore, at once divining the countess's generous motive.

"But who is to have the picture when it is done?" asked the count.

"Your lordship, if it be worth your acceptance," replied De Willenberg.

"Nay,

“Nay, I put in my *veto* against that!” objected madame Bertonville; “it is absolutely bilking me—I had almost made up my mind to ask it.”

“But, fortunately, Matilda, I had *quite* made up mine; however, I will persuade him to copy it for you.”

“With infinite pleasure I will,” said Theodore.

“Indeed you shall not, you ill-natured creature!” added the countess; “I will please myself, and have something more to my taste, to be revenged on you! I will have—yes, I insist upon it, knowing you are something of a poet—I will have a fine glowing description of this whole picture in blank verse; and you shall introduce every one of us under the most beautiful characters and titles; in a word, you must write a poem, and call it Theodore De Willenberg in Search of the Picturesque.”

“I shall have plenty of materials here,”  
said

said the again sprightly Theodore; "permit me then to nominate your ladyship the heroine."

"Vastly well arranged!" observed the countess, archly; "make *me* the heroine, and keep a certain young lady," glancing at Victoria, "in the shade!"

"I must confess," said the duke, finding his malevolent attacks were so completely parried off, and likely to revert upon himself, and assuming now an air of facetiousness—"I must confess, that were I lady Victoria, I would punish you as your want of gallantry deserves, and let you go and make your drawing by yourself."

The hint was lost upon Victoria; but madame Bertonville continued—"I will give her no excuse; she shall be the heroine; the author shall be her lover, and I shall be her interesting confidante."

"I will be still her fond old father," said count Herman.

"I will be a little page, to wait on cousin Victoria,"

Victoria," said Henri Bertonville; "and, Theodore, you must make the duke some great prince in love with Victoria, and wanting to rob you of her and marry her; but you must make her hate the very sight of him, and marry *you* at last!"

This artless speech had nearly discomposed all Leopold's stock of firmness; for a moment he fixed a dreadful look on the innocent Henri, who, unconscious of having given offence, smiled at the happy thought.

The count and madame Bertonville smiled also at his ingenuity, not aware of the sting it had carried with it, or how appropriate was the character assigned to the duke.

Theodore and Victoria were covered with blushes. At that instant, they would have given worlds to be separated, each fearful of betraying too much to the other; while

while they were almost ready to snatch the child to their bosoms, and kiss him in rapturous gratitude, for his having hinted such an event as their union, however improbable it appeared to both.

In despite of the duke's manifest aim to annoy and offend them under the mask of raillery, they could not help pitying him for the pain they concluded his wounded feelings must have sustained from Henri's unlucky suggestion; and unwilling to distress him further, by remaining witnesses of his chagrin, which they alone perceived, they hastened towards the cliff.

A narrow beach, slanting towards the river, ran to a considerable extent in front of the rocks, in several places obliquely descending into the water. Here a numerous train of fine healthy-looking children, belonging to the neighbouring cottages, were now, in various ways, enjoying themselves; some, with eager interest and  
delight,

delight, watching the spreading circles they made by flinging pebbles into the water; others, at a distance, as anxiously following with their eyes the direction of the baits they threw in for some of the smaller sort of fish.

De Willenberg and our heroine stopped for a few minutes to admire these happy groups, and then ascending a few yards to where they could take in the whole landscape at one view, Theodore drew forth his pencil and pocketbook, and commenced his pleasing task. Having faithfully sketched the outline of this romantic little picture, which shewed the touches of a masterly hand, he gave it to Victoria, who had eagerly watched its progress from the first stroke of the pencil, and requested she would add something which he had forgotten.

He leaned over her in rapture, at the exquisite style in which she drew, until, blushing

blushing at the ardent and tender looks he involuntarily fixed on her features, she begged him, with a smile, not to cast so scrutinous an eye over her poor efforts, or it would certainly make her spoil the whole.

He now seated himself beside her, and turned to view the different occupations of the juvenile party below.—“Happy, happy beings!” he mentally aspirated, “innocent as happy! and does indeed that happiness which so often eludes the grasp of age, wealth, rank, and power, fly thus spontaneously to the bosoms of youth, the children of obscurity and poverty!—Poverty!” he reiterated; “no; they are richer than the richest of the great ones, for contentment is their treasure—better than the most upright, for the name of Vice they know not—more exalted than the nobles who sway the places that gave them birth, for their peaceful stations they would not exchange

exchange for all the gorgeous grandeur of ambition."

From his soliloquy he was suddenly aroused by a clashing and terrific sound in the water; he started from his seat—"Merciful Heaven, the child's lost!" he wildly exclaimed, and, with almost frantic desperation, having dashed off his outer coat, he plunged instantly into the frightful depth beneath.

Victoria screamed aloud, at once conjecturing the horrible truth, that one of the children had fallen in, and that Theodore had braved destruction in trying to save it. Providentially her cries were heard by some fishermen, whose cottages were close by, and who immediately ran, in consternation, to see what had happened.

De Willenberg had risen to the surface of the water, where he was struggling with

with the weight of the senseless boy and his own clothes; and the fishermen unmooring their boats, with all the haste that prompt humanity and kindness inspired, directly rushed to his assistance.

They succeeded in dragging him and his little burden into one of the boats, where, totally exhausted, his enervated arm dropped the child it had, till that moment, firmly grasped; he fell prostrate and insensible along the bottom of the vessel, and almost at the same instant, the hapless young sufferer he had so magnanimously risked his life in endeavouring to preserve, ceased to live.

CHAPTER IV.  
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—————Virtue does still
With scorn the mercenary world regard,
Where abject souls do good, and hope reward
Beyond the worthless trophies men can raise.

Rowe.

THE alarm had now been spread, and the bank was covered with dismayed spectators. Terror had for some minutes rendered Victoria insensible to what was passing, and on somewhat recovering, she found herself folded in her father's arms. —“ My child! my darling! thank God, thank God! you are safe!” he affectionately exclaimed, pressing her still closer to his bosom, and then sobbing convulsively, his head dropped on the shoulder of her he had himself until now been supporting. The

The agony arising from excess of joy at her safety having abated, he started, and clasped his hands in reproach at his having, in the ardency of that joy, so nearly forgotten his almost equally-adored Theodore, who was borne ashore in the arms of two of the men. What a sight was his pallid and deathlike form for the heart-rived Victoria! On beholding him motionless, and to all appearance perfectly devoid of life, her head grew giddy, her vision became dimmed, and placing her hand before her eyes to shut out the appalling spectacle, with a faint cry of anguish, she dropped fainting into the arms of the weeping madame Bertonville.

Here was a fresh calamity; between two objects so dear to him, the count scarcely knew which to fly to, but assured by his sister that Victoria would soon revive, and conscious that to prevent the vital spark in Theodore from entire extinction required instant and powerful assistance,

sistance, he returned to the latter, the duke having meantime offered, with the countess, and the aid of one of the bystanders, to conduct lady Victoria back to the castle, and dispatch some of the domestics immediately to this dreadful scene, which he did as soon as our heroine had unclosed her eyes, and was able to proceed with them.

A humane and honest-looking peasant held the corpse of the child in his arms, while big tears trickled down his sunburnt cheeks for its untimely fate. The count viewed it with great agitation, and tears of sympathy burst forth unrestrained from this benevolent and venerable man—"Oh, noble, excellent, matchless being!" he sobbed, "has he thus risked his invaluable life to no purpose? This sweet boy is breathless! quite, quite dead! and, alas! my Theodore is scarcely less cold and inanimate!"

The

The necessity of great exertion and promptitude to effect De Willenberg's recovery, was obvious to all ; and it was apprehended, that if they undertook to convey him so far as the castle before some potent remedies were had recourse to, all hope would speedily be terminated.

In this agonizing dilemma, one of the fishermen respectfully approached the count, and making a profound bow, which almost brought his head in contact with the ground, he thus addressed him—" I be but a poor fellow, to be sure, my lord, and I humbly ask your lordship's pardon if I offend you ; but indeed I know you are too kind to scorn me because I am not rich. Now there is my poor little cottage yonder, and if your lordship would but condescend to let us bring that brave, noble, worthy young gentleman to it, we have got a comfortable wood fire, and a good warm bed beside it, into the bargain, to put him into, and blankets, and all as clean

as hands can make them, I do think we could soon recover him. Old Marguerite, my wife, will quickly bring him to with some of her doctor's stuff. God bless her! she's a charitable, good old soul as ever breathed, though I say it myself, only she does talk a little matter too much, like other old magpies; but it would brighten up her poor dear face to see such grand folks as your lordship and that young cavalier inside our humble doors."

"You have not mistaken me, my friend," said the count, in a kind and conciliating tone. "With gratitude I accept your hospitable offer, and be assured it shall not go unrewarded. But let us lose not a moment; every succeeding one increases my fears for him; therefore conduct us thither, I entreat you, without delay."

With a smile of genuine humanity and goodness, and eyes irradiated by the hope of contributing to the restoration of De
Willenberg,

Willenberg, and the happiness of count Herman, who had gained the love of every poor, as well as every rich man, in his neighbourhood, Dominique led the way to his homely but comfortable abode.

The most melancholy part of the scene still remained to be witnessed. Their ears were presently assailed by the most heart-rending and piteous screams, and they beheld the mother of the drowned child frantically running from an opposite hamlet with her lifeless infant in her arms.

She suddenly stopped, and gazing with a look of wild despair on its pallid features, she seemed for a moment in a state of unconsciousness; a torrent of tears at length began to flow, and with a harrowing burst of agony she exclaimed—"Oh, oh, my William! my darling boy! my angel! my only—only child! what is to become of me, now you are gone? Who shall your poor

G 4

mother

mother have to comfort her in her old days? Oh, Heaven, extend thy pity to me! All I held dear on earth fled! my husband, my child, both—both gone for ever! I shall never, never see them again!” and hiding her face now on its cold bosom, she wept bitterly.

On entering the cottage, count Herman handed a purse to Dominique, requesting he would go and present it to the afflicted woman, and offer her, in his name, every consolation in his power to bestow, with an assurance that the lord of Herman Castle would henceforth be her friend and benefactor.

The interior of the cottage was strikingly neat, and Marguerite, a respectable-looking woman, long past the meridian of life, unwilling to quit her occupation of cooking her fond husband's wholesome supper, was pacing to and fro in trembling anxiety

anxiety to know what direful event had occasioned the alarm, and summoned him so abruptly from his cheerful fireside.

On seeing the inanimate De Willenberg carried in by Dominique and two other men, her presence of mind did not forsake her. She guessed what had happened, and instantly anticipating what her husband was about to say, she began busily to prepare the bed for the reception of "the dear young gentleman."

A crowd of well-meaning people followed, all offering their services; but the count seeing that their numbers were more likely to impede than promote the necessary exertions for Theodore's recovery, mildly reminded them of it; and having insisted on handsomely remunerating all who had been in any way accessory to his rescue from a watery grave, he thanked them for the heartfelt concern they evinced, and entreated them to depart, which, with

G 5

tearful

tearful eyes, they did, having first received a promise, that when he revived, and was past all danger, they should be informed of it.

In the meantime old Dominique, who had readily undertaken the office of ministering angel to dame Gertrude's woes, approached her with all the gentleness of his nature, and the most soothing voice he could assume, holding the glittering offer up to her view.—“ Now, dame,” said he, “ if you take this misfortune so to heart, you know, our old Bible says it is a very wicked thing—ay, and a crying shame, and a sin, to fly in the face of the Lord. I will be bound to say, that little Billy is happier than you or me now, singing hymns in heaven—ay, that he is, if ever a child went there. God bless him and all of us, and send us there! Here, Gertrude, here is what will comfort your aching heart, though, to be sure, as a body may say, it has been sorely cut by such a misfortune—
here

here is what the great lord sent you that is now biding in my little hut over the way. Blessings on him, and that sweet young cavalier! who is, for all the world, the finest fellow my two good-looking eyes ever beheld. Alack-a-day, what a woeful plight he was in! Oh, if you had but seen him struggling in the river, with poor Bill in one hand, while he kept himself afloat with the other! Come, come, now, dame, you know it is of no avail to fret and cry so—though, Lord, is it not all natural enough? Poor Bill! he was a nice, well-behaved child; but put your trust in God, Gertrude, and he will soon send you another, glory be to his holy name!”

This harangue, delivered with much emphasis, appeared to have had some influence in checking the violence of Gertrude's grief; and drying her eyes with the corner of her apron—“ Oh, Gaffer!” said she, “ how—how am I to have another? I shall never be a wife or mother again.”

This was a question that, with all his profound powers of reasoning, puzzled poor Dominique, who, to evade it, slipped the purse into her hand. She regarded it for some time with doubt and amazement, then again looking in the face of her child, she sobbed aloud, and turned homewards, invoking blessings on her noble benefactor.

By the time Dominique returned, the unremitting assiduities of those around him had at length happily succeeded in rekindling the little spark of life that lingered in the bosom of De Willenberg. He had been expeditiously divested of his wet clothes, and placed in the bed which the attentive Marguerite had taken care to warm for him; she then had recourse to her pharmacopœia, the whole of which she rummaged, to find out the most efficient remedies and potent cordials. Every pot and bottle—every herb and balsam that composed her stock of medicine, were on this occasion routed from their shelves, and

and fortunately some of them did in reality possess the virtues she ascribed to them, "having," as she said, "been made of the very best of every thing by her own two hands."

On opening his eyes, and finding himself in such a situation, De Willenberg was sensibly affected. The count was hanging over him, with one of his hands fast clasped in his, and regarding him with deep solicitude and tenderness. At first he seemed rather bewildered at the sight of strangers, and the confusion of ideas that crowded on him; but he was soon brought to a perfect recollection of the past, and one of his most anxious inquiries was whether the child had survived? They were obliged to deceive him with an affirmative, lest the shock of hearing it was no more, should again overcome him. His next interrogatory related to Victoria's safety, who, with madame Bertonville, had, he hoped, sustained no more than a temporary

temporary alarm. Assured of this, he became in a short time quite composed; and those whose attendance was now no longer necessary, took their leave for the night, with looks of unfeigned joy at their providential success, and proud of receiving the grateful thanks of the count and his amiable charge.

Tired nature, now almost spent with so long and severe an exercise of its energies, required the aid of its "sweet restorer, balmy sleep;" and De Willenberg feeling the tranquillizing effects of the opiate Marguerite had administered to him, entreated the count to return home, and his generous hosts to retire to rest, and by degrees sunk into a calm and refreshing sleep.

But to leave him thus was far from being the intention of any.

"We have another good bed, to be sure,"

sure," said Dominique, "Heaven be praised! but it would not do for us poor folks to go and lie down comfortably, and let your lordship be without a bed to take your proper night's rest on. No, no; we are not such Hottentots as that."

"The Virgin forbid!" cried his wife.

"Now do, my lord," continued he, "go and have a good sound sleep, if you will condescend to get into such a bed as it is, and Marguerite has put nice clean linen on it, and——"

"Ay, that I have, my lord," interrupted his *cara sposa*. "Now do let us prevail on your lordship to go, and my old man and I will watch all night beside this sweet young gentleman, as if he was our own born child. Bless his beautiful face! it puts me so in mind of our poor dear Jacques, that is gone to be a sailor. Ah! well do I remember the very morning he went; it poured and poured, as if the very sky was crying, as well as ourselves, and——"

"Lord love you, don't go over that long story,

story, that you have told fifty times again and again, at such a time as this!" said Dominique, perceiving that his better half was about to indulge freely in the grand prerogative of woman; "his lordship does not want to talk now about our Jaques, or any body else."

At this instant Conrad, the long-attached and faithful servant of De Willenberg, entered to inquire again about his beloved master, and to see if he was still improving. Traces of tears were yet visible in the eyes of this worthy domestic, who, as soon as he had heard of what had happened, had flown to him with all the speed anxiety and affection could lend him; nor could he be persuaded to quit the bedside, until fully assured that animation was so completely restored, as to promise every probability of his recovery. At the request of the count, he then repaired to the castle, to inform all there of the happy result of their exertions. He

was

was the fourth messenger sent thither to quiet their apprehensions; and having performed his mission, he hastened back to stay with his master during the night.

By another of the servants who accompanied him, the count addressed a few lines to the duke of Silesia, entreating his highness to make allowances for his absence, and expressing his desire to remain at the cottage until next morning, when Theodore could with safety be removed; and again communicating his patient's favourable symptoms to Victoria and the countess, he took his station beside the bed.

The duke was secretly pleased at this, as the absence of the count, and of Theodore in particular, would for a few hours afford him exclusively the society of Victoria and her prepossessing aunt. He was not so inhuman, so sunk in depravity, as to rejoice at such a circumstance as that which had threatened the life of De Wil-
lenberg,

lenberg, his hated rival, or be chagrined at the intelligence of his recovery; but still, as that very circumstance was in effect so favourable to his wishes, and that now no danger was to be dreaded, he at least did not regret it. Affecting, however, to feel the deepest concern, the better to ingratiate himself with Victoria, who he had soon observed viewed him in no very flattering light, he contrived to loiter out the remainder of the evening at the castle. Ere his reluctant departure he begged leave to promise himself the pleasure of calling on the ensuing day, "for the purpose," he said, "of congratulating them all, and Theodore in particular, on his recovery;" but in reality, as it would afford him an additional opportunity of seeing Victoria, in whom he found something new every hour to increase his admiration.

Amongst the studies the count had pursued at the university in his early days,
and

and indeed almost to the present period, was that of medicine, one of his most favourite sciences, and one in which his profound researches were shortly rewarded by an ample knowledge of his subject ; so that being an accomplished scholar, he possessed every requisite, with the exception of a formal certificate, for becoming a member of the Æsculapian body. He had seen several cases of suspended animation, and paid particular attention to the different modes used for its restoration, amongst which, that of inflating the lungs seemed to him the most important and effectual, and to which remedy he had resorted in this desperate emergency.

The castle being at a great distance from the residence of any practitioner of eminence, he saw that it would be not only absurd, but highly culpable, to await the arrival of a physician, ere any active measures were adopted, aware that by that time such measures would be all to no purpose,

purpose, and De Willenberg have sunk completely into the sleep of death, through reprehensible and criminal neglect.

Such were the prudent and laudable motives of the count for resolving to be himself De Willenberg's medical attendant; but it was also his determination, should circumstances indicate the propriety of it, to summon a physician from the metropolis on the following day.

In any other case, Conrad's modesty and good sense would have dictated to him the indecorum of obtruding himself into the company of his superiors; but sorrow, like death, is a leveller of distinction, and in their mutual condolence, inequality was for a while mutually forgotten.

The most winning affability of manners towards all to whom fortune had assigned a place in society less elevated than his own, ever particularly distinguished count
Herman,

Herman, and in scrupulously avoiding any thing like an exaction of homage or respect, his magnanimity was ever rewarded by the love, respect, and reverence of all.

By those of more exalted rank he was equally venerated, for he possessed too much innate dignity to bend servilely to the looks of power or of rank, however high, unaccompanied by those virtues that in reality ennoble man; while he had too much sound sense also, not duly to esteem and appreciate such virtues, and such he found graced the cottage of the peasant oftener than the palace of the prince.

Fearful of being in the way, or his presence being any restraint upon these good people, he requested, as they would not go to bed, that they would at least refresh themselves with their comfortable supper, which had lain untouched for some hours. He read in their eloquent looks the wishes they did not venture to utter; and at once comprehending

comprehending the motive, he unhesitatingly gratified them by partaking of their plentiful meal.

Marguerite was so much elated by the condescension of their illustrious guest, that she found it totally impossible to restrain her usual volubility, and she could not help telling the count the whole story, with innumerable digressions, of—"how an unfortunate young girl had fallen in love with her poor dear Jaques; but the one Jaques loved had unfeelingly married another, and he could never love any body else; and so this said unfortunate young girl, finding her passion unreturned, had recourse to the desperate extremity of ending her love and her life together, for which very silly and very terrible purpose, she thought proper one day to fling herself neck and heels into the river, almost in the very spot where the *dear young gentleman* was so near losing his life; and she having unluckily, before the fatal plunge,

tied

tied her legs together by means of her garters, struggled and struggled in vain to get out again, just then thinking she had done a very foolish thing; and her folly was attended by the consequence she might have expected—her sinking very soon to the bottom, and taking her unwilling departure to another world. This her poor dear Jaques took very much to heart, and could never bear to look at that death-tempting river afterwards. But in order to avoid seeing it, it was necessary that he should not continue to live beside it, and therefore he made up his mind to go to sea, which he did one very wet and stormy day, their tears considerably adding to the torrents of rain, and their sighs to the howling winds.

“ Well, to sea her poor dear Jaques went, and many a battle had he fought, and much the prize-money he had obtained, which he failed not to share with them,
thus

thus gaining honour to himself, and imparting happiness to their old hearts."

During this recital, which she spun out as long as she thought human patience could endure it, she had been more than once interrupted by her considerate husband; but she was not to be so easily discouraged when she had entered upon her favourite theme, and with a quiet "well, as I was saying," she went on, with perfect composure, to the very end of her poor dear Jaques' eventful history, naturally concluding that, as the count refused to go to bed, he required something to keep him awake, which, if talking could do, he, with a smile, owned to himself that she had hit on a most infallible remedy.

The morning was considerably advanced before Theodore awoke; and when he did, their expectations of the beneficial effects of so long and sound a sleep were realized.

The

The returning colour in his cheek announced that his health and cheerfulness were returning also; but fatigued by all he had gone through, he was still languid and weak; his expressive countenance declared his gratitude to his preservers, ere his lips had time to utter it. In the most animated manner, he thanked the kind old couple who had so cheerfully relinquished a whole night's rest to watch beside him. His features acquired an additional glow from the energy with which he spoke, and this gave a fresh stimulus to Marguerite's easily-stimulated propensity to hear the (to her) most delightful sound of her own voice. The beauty of her poor dear Jaques being a never-failing topic, she contrived to find out a striking resemblance between him and De Willenberg. Each had the same fine high and polished forehead, fair as the driven snow—the same sparkling jet black eyes—the same curly raven locks—the same finely-shaped and manly limbs—the same graceful mien;

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erect

erect and dignified! - In short, could she have reconciled impossibilities, she would have made it out that her poor dear Jaques and our elegant young hero were one and the same person.

This fond mother fancied her son almost perfection; nor had she a little flattered him in a comparison with De Willenberg. Each of them had, it is true, eyes, nose, and mouth, besides a tolerable head of hair; and so far they were unquestionably alike, but no farther: however, this was Marguerite's hobby, and her auditors were highly amused at her unwearied indulgence on it.

Theodore now learned the gratifying intelligence that Victoria and madame Bertonville had been the first visitors from the castle that morning, and at a very early hour had come to inquire how he had passed the night. Having received a satisfactory account of him, and the count's promise

mise that, should Theodore's strength be sufficient to permit his removal, they would breakfast at the castle, our heroine and her aunt returned, expecting that by the time they reached home, the duke of Silesia would be there.

Punctual to his appointment, the self-invited duke had indeed arrived. They found him amusing the attentively-listening Henri (whose favour he thought it as well to preserve) with numerous tales of battles and warlike exploits; and when his fond mother came in, Leopold, in order to win her favour effectually, again predicted the future glorious achievements of her son.

According to the count's direction, the carriage was now sent to convey him and De Willenberg home. The latter felt so much the debilitating effects of all he had undergone, that he would have preferred remaining where he was, and in bed, for at least the rest of the day, had there not

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been

been something that operated as a charm over his almost-exhausted frame. The idea of seeing Victoria lent him for a while a degree of strength almost supernatural, and without allowing the count to perceive the effort he made, he at once prepared to accompany him.

No arguments could persuade Dominique or his wife to accept the smallest recompence for their hospitality. In vain the count reasoned and insisted; they would receive no remuneration; their services, as they had been prompt and efficacious, so had they been disinterested; and their feelings being evidently mortified by the supposition that they could take a bribe for performing the common offices of humanity, he at length ceased to urge it, on condition that they would both come and spend a certain day in every week with Jacintha, the old housekeeper at the castle—a proposition that Marguerite, in particular, most readily agreed to, as

she happened to know that dame Jacintha was luckily gifted with an inexhaustible fund of loquacity, and such extraordinary volubility of tongue, as almost outstripped her own.

CHAPTER V.
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But he, his own affection's counsellor,  
Is to himself so secret and so close,  
As is the bud bit with an envious worm,  
Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,  
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.

SHAKESPEARE.

THEODORE, not having been informed of the intended second visit of the duke, was not a little surprised at finding him at the castle; that surprise was mingled with something like displeasure at seeing him deeply engaged in an apparently-interesting conversation with Victoria; for just before his entrance, the duke had contrived to engross her attention to some trifling topic, to which his consummate art gave a degree of momentary interest.

He

He knew not why he ought to feel displeased, yet he did feel so; and at first the cold and formal salute of mere politeness seemed to him all she was deserving of; nor was he more warmly disposed towards Leopold: but when she arose, with the sweet and resistless smile she always wore to him, the true indication of the pleasure she experienced in seeing him—  
—extended her beautiful hand to receive his, and told him, in a tone that came from the heart, how happy she was to behold him safe under her father's roof once more, every shade of uneasiness vanished; a congenial smile irradiated his fine features, which, more powerfully than words could do, told her how happy *he* felt in being under the same roof with *her* again.

This intrusion was by no means agreeable to the duke, who could hardly conceal that it was not so; but now convinced that Theodore was an established favourite with all the inmates of the castle, and that

every effort to lessen their esteem for him would be not only unavailing, but probably afford a clue to the development of his own character; he deemed it prudent to master his feelings, and be studiously courteous and attentive to him in future.

It came at length to the impatient Henri's turn to be noticed. He had modestly refrained from obtruding himself till the very last, and was standing pensively at one of the windows; but seeing De Willenberg approach him, a glow of delight mantled his pretty cheeks, and in a transport of joy the affectionate boy sprang into his arms, and kissed him.

"Oh, Theodore," said he, "I never thought I could have wept so much for any body as I have for you! I thought we had lost you for ever; and if we had, I should soon have died from grief; but you are come back safe to us all, and so we will be happy once more, and you must

must never, never go near that terrible river again.—Do now promise me that you will not.”

“I trust I shall never give my sweet little friend cause to weep again,” said Theodore.

“The little goosicap is actually in tears this moment!” observed Victoria, coming over and patting his cheek.

“Now I am sure, cousin Victoria,” sobbed he, “*you* ought not to reproach me, for you cried as bitterly as I did last night yourself; and I know you love him too as well as I do, though you don’t tell him so.”

“You are determined to reward his bravery, at all events,” said the countess, “by assuring him, on your own authority, that a young lady loves him. You think, with the song, that none but the brave deserve the fair.”

“And always most candidly speaks what he thinks,” said Victoria, endeavouring, if possible, to look unembarrassed; while Theodore, forgetful for a moment

of every thing else, in the blissful idea that she did indeed love him, had almost so far betrayed himself as to let Henri fall from his arms.

“ But indeed, mamma, I know that she does love him,” proceeded Henri, not understanding, or not choosing to understand, his fair cousin’s disconcerted looks, “ for she said last night, that if he were to die, neither she, nor any body else in the castle, could ever be happy again.”

It required no more than this to confirm De Willenberg’s hopes; it was proof positive; and from such a proof, how could he feel otherwise than happy? but perceiving that Henri’s well-meant exposure of her sentiments was painful to Victoria, he endeavoured, with as much address as possible, to silence him, which he by degrees effected.

“ And now, young lady, if you have a few minutes to spare to talk to an old man, where

where is my picture that you have so slyly tried to defraud me out of?" demanded the count.

"And which *you* did, *bona fide*, defraud *me* out of," observed madame Bertonville, glancing at her brother.

"Indeed my father accuses me wrongfully," returned our heroine, opening a little drawer in a bureau, and reluctantly producing it. "But—but I wished—that is, I thought a little addition to it would evince—I mean, would improve it."

"Come then, tell us what this addition would evince, and how it would improve it, and what it *is* altogether?" continued the count.

"My life on it, I guess!" cried madame Bertonville, archly. "I know not what your lordship may think, but, in my opinion, the figure of a young man, heroically plunging into the river to save a drowning infant, would impart a certain interest to the whole picture it were otherwise devoid of."

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“And look extremely like reality,” observed the duke. “What is your ladyship’s opinion?” demanded he, addressing Victoria.

“That it would be very appropriate,” she replied.

“Then make that addition, Victoria,” said her father, with emphasis; “and as the idea was yours, so also shall be the picture, as I know you wish to keep it.”

“There is a hopeful brother,” exclaimed the countess, “never to offer it to *me*!”

“Indeed, my dear aunt, you shall have it, when it is finished, if you *wish*,” said Victoria, ever ready to sacrifice her own gratification to that of others.

“Yes, my love,” replied her aunt; “I will have it hung in your boudoir, where, I know, you will best like to see it, and where it shall remain; so put it up for the present, for methinks it is time Pietro should summon us to breakfast.”

“Indeed I think so too,” said Henri.

At

At that moment Pietro himself opened the door, to announce what they had been wishing for, and count Herman led the way to the saloon, where, on Leopold's account, a collation, more than usually elegant, had been prepared.

De Willenberg's exertion in quitting his bed, ere his health was really adequate to it, proved too much for his constitution to sustain with firmness, and breakfast, a meal he usually enjoyed more than any other, now remained almost untouched by him. His assumed energy had exhausted itself; a general lassitude pervaded his frame; he could no longer wear the semblance of health and spirits he possessed not, and all present remarked the alteration in his appearance, particularly the count, whose anxiety about him induced him to propose sending for a physician immediately, in which he was joined by the rest.

To this however Theodore would not  
agree;

agree; with a faint smile, he told the count that he would continue to be *his* patient exclusively; such being his wish, it was not opposed, and he forthwith followed his salutary prescription, of retiring to bed, and taking some proper medicine, furnished from his lordship's chest; having previously requested that no apprehensions might be entertained respecting him, which would disturb the quiet of the family, as it needed no more than a little self-denial on his part to restore him to perfect health.

Aware that any appearance of dejection on his account would only tend to make him uneasy, they strove to look cheerful, and to conceal that alarm about him which they really felt.

Never, indeed, till now, did Victoria believe she could feel so seriously interested for him; for never till now had she been so fully convinced that she loved him,

him, and that her love was returned with ardour and sincerity; and the means that had brought her such a proof, though painful and distressing to herself, she now could hardly regret.

The count expressed a wish that madame Bertonville and Victoria would visit the abode of Gertrude, to endeavour to console her for the loss of her little boy, and should she appear worthy of his bounty, to promise her, in his name, a small independence for the remainder of her life.

Ever ready to undertake an office of humanity, they instantly agreed to this, and, as soon as Theodore had withdrawn, prepared to set out.

Had they been going on any other mission, the duke would immediately have offered to escort them; but great as his wish was for Victoria's society, he thought it would be derogatory to his royal dignity,  
to

to accompany them to the humble abode of poverty, however deserving, or however laudable, might be the purpose for which they were going. Under this impression, he took his leave as soon after breakfast as he could do so with a good grace, and without giving them room to suspect his motive.

Luckily for him, however, the repugnance to his accompanying them was mutually felt: Victoria disliking him, wished not for his company, and madame Bertonville, who longed for an opportunity of having some private conversation with her niece, was glad that to that opportunity he offered no impediment.

The count and Henri remained with De Willenberg, and the ladies therefore set out, *tête-à-tête*, on their walk.

None had Victoria's happiness and welfare more at heart than the countess, for she

she regarded her with maternal affection; and there was a subject she deemed connected with that happiness, which she had long wished to speak to her about, and a more favourable time than the present she could not have chosen. Her penetration had very soon discovered her niece's predilection for Theodore. Nor was she less acute in her observations on the latter, who, if required not much discernment to perceive was no less partial to our heroine.

De Willenberg had ever been one of her most distinguished favourites, and it was her earnest wish to see him united to one so eminently calculated to make him happy as Victoria; each, she knew, possessed the qualifications necessary to contribute to the felicity of the other; but, alas! whatever degree of happiness it is possible for mortal to attain, will not spontaneously present itself within our grasp; if we would possess it, we must labour  
for

for it, and cull it from amongst the vicissitudes of the world, as the bee culls her sweets often from the humblest weeds. It is as a vast mountain in our road through life, to gain whose summit we must encounter the brambles and thorns that surround its base, nor shrink from climbing the fearful height.

Madame Bertonville feared, as well as our lovers, that obstacles existed to their union, which might not be easily overcome, and the chief of which was Theodore's having been so completely abandoned by his father; like Victoria, she feared that the count would never consent to her marriage with a discarded son, let the cause of his abandonment be what it might, or however free from culpability Theodore might virtually be. She was slightly acquainted with his father, and from the little she did know of his character, she wished to know no more. She had also been informed of his rejection of mademoiselle Klopstock, and,

and more than he himself was aware of, a vow she had made to be revenged for the affront.

She sometimes deemed that vow the mere impulse of quick resentment, without any determinate meaning; but at others she entertained serious apprehensions that the malignant Maddeline, having had her pride so stung, by an absolute refusal from De Willenberg to become her husband, was indeed brewing in her dark mind some terrible plot of vengeance, which she would stop at nothing to execute.

But this was not all. In her frequent conversations with Theodore she had learned the state of his heart, that his affections were unalienably fixed upon Victoria, though he forbore openly to avow it; and she at once saw that that forbearance proceeded from an apprehension that he had unfortunately placed his  
love

love on an unattainable object, his poverty, and his almost-isolated state, rendering him, in his own opinion, unworthy of her. Nor would she urge a confession that must have been so painful to him, seeing that she could not, with propriety, encourage him to hope that his passion would ever be rewarded as she wished. She had never hitherto addressed her niece on such a topic, prudently wishing, that if her love were hopeless, it might, with time, wear entirely away; but the last few days had effected a total alteration in her opinion, and she now firmly believed that every thing was in a fair train for renewing the hopes, and confirming the happiness of each.

From Victoria's ingenuous replies she easily ascertained all she wished to know. Our heroine was not one who could easily dissemble, and almost before she was aware of it, her warm and confiding heart sent a full confession to her lips.

It

It was now madame Bertonville's intention to exert all her influence with the count, her brother, to promote the union of this amiable pair, not doubting that she should be able to draw a similar avowal of his love from De Willenberg, for she had learned enough to convince her of it; and this she did not hesitate to inform Victoria of, whose feelings on the occasion our feeble pen must acknowledge itself inadequate justly to describe.

She fancied, however, that if her father even should consent to it, she could not, with propriety, at so early a period of her life as the present, undertake the duties of a wife—the important duties attached to a character so sacred in the eye of every divine and human law; but the thought of being at a future day the beloved wife of Theodore De Willenberg was all of happiness she was now capable of enjoying.

They

They found dame Gertrude, surrounded by a party of her neighbours, all gossiping forth their lamentations, sincere and otherwise, for the death of "poor Billy."

The first sentence that struck our heroine's ears on entering, was a panegyric on the bravery and the personal beauty of De Willenberg; it was uttered by a spruce young woman, who had, by the will of fate, married a man old enough to be at least her father. She now very good-naturedly wished him far under ground, and herself a lady, for the young cavalier's sake; "for fortunate," she added, "will be the woman who gets him."

"Fortunate indeed!" thought Victoria. Her eye just then encountered a significant glance from her aunt, which told her, as plainly as looks could tell her, that she was to be that fortunate woman. She immediately comprehended it, and a momentary blush betrayed that she did.

On

On perceiving "the great ladies from the castle," this host of chatterers quickly arose, and made their obeisance. An extraordinary phenomenon ensued, for although they were all women, they were all instantly as silent as the grave. The affectionate wife, who had so charitably wished her husband in a better world, along with "poor Bill," not feeling quite comfortable in the idea of having been overheard by the ladies, made a motion, in dumb show, to depart, which her sister parrots understanding, she moved off, followed by the whole train, who had no sooner cleared the threshold of the door, than, as if simultaneously bent on requiting themselves for the agony of a moment's silence, they broke forth, one and all, into a loud and confused jargon of exclamations, questions, answers, and conjectures, as to the most probable cause of such grand folks coming to the poor abode of Gertrude, who, in the meantime, had ushered her noble visitors into a neat little room,

room, where, in all the bigoted solemnity of the Catholic ritual, the corpse of her child lay, until the coffin should arrive to bear it to the last receptacle of mortality.

Having carefully wiped two of her best chairs, she begged they would be seated; and as she fixed her eyes on the colourless face of her boy, they again filled with tears. Not satisfied with the innumerable encomiums her ever-talking neighbours had been lavishing on Theodore for the last two hours, with all the rapidity their tongues were capable of, she began the subject afresh, and seemed as little afraid as ever the worthy Marguerite was that she might tire her auditors.

They were at length obliged to interrupt her, and having satisfactorily arranged the business upon which they came, they again bent their steps homeward.

Theodore had slept soundly for two or  
three

three hours, and for fear of disturbing him, the count and Henri had softly quitted his chamber. He awoke much refreshed, and glad to find himself alone, that he might give way to the train of reflections that crowded on his mind, and which the last two days gave ample subjects for.

From his earliest infancy he remembered that he had ever been a favourite with the count Herman, who, in various ways, had unequivocally manifested his partiality; but his deportment towards him had lately been so kind, so friendly, so like that of an affectionate parent, that he sometimes could not help supposing he felt more than an ordinary interest in every thing that concerned him. This idea the late occurrence had tended to confirm, several expressions having escaped his lordship, indicating some plan with regard to him, which he had not yet made known; that something relating to him was in contemplation, he was almost sure

of; but the uncertainty as to what it might be was often painful to him, and he wished, though he did not venture, to interrogate the count, who, had he been as indifferent about him as a common acquaintance, Theodore would not have experienced any of the uneasiness he did.

He sometimes thought it was his promotion his benefactor had in view, that he meant, by his interest, to raise him to a higher post in the army; but there was another, an infinitely-sweeter hope that occasionally took possession of him, and one which he could not easily dismiss; for it was one that now, in particular, seemed not only his possible, but probable actuator. Of Victoria's sentiments there was no room for a doubt—that she loved him was unquestionable. Yes, he was now convinced, as far as every thing short of an actual confession from her own lips could convince him, that Victoria, the beautiful Victoria, who had beheld at her feet

feet crowds of illustrious suitors, with all of rank and riches to recommend them, had indeed given the preference to him, untitled, unfortunated, and abandoned by his father, as he seemed to be.

With all his previous conscientious arguments, all his but half-formed wishes to be assured of this, still was it to his heart joy unspeakable, and for a long time he lay unable to think of any thing else. Before this delightful conviction all his scruples vanished; of his own passion, deeming it hopeless, he had determined not to let the slightest hint escape him—to preserve it inviolably a secret. He had intended rather to avoid than to seek a knowledge of the like from Victoria; but how soon were all those determinations overthrown! they were as “the baseless fabric of a vision,” and his newly-raised hopes “left not a wreck behind.”

His hopes were indeed suddenly regenerated,

nerated, raised to the highest pitch; the brightest prospects opened to his vivid imagination, for he had fixed, in his own mind, that the object the count had in view could be nothing else than uniting him to his daughter. Circumstances were decidedly in favour of this opinion, for all the inmates of the castle now treated him with even more attention and respect than hitherto; and instead of regretting his having unwarily betrayed his attachment, he a thousand times blessed his little friend Henri for having been the occasion of it.

Wrapt in these blissful visions, he gave full scope to the scenes of happiness his fancy drew; and now that he had soared into the regions of hope, he found them almost without end, and without alloy; every thing he wished for appeared probable, and easy of accomplishment. His father had sent him from him for a while as a punishment his disobedience perhaps deserved;



nothing else could; and he trusted that a match, in every way so eligible and advantageous, would be the means of restoring him entirely to his favour.

In these waking dreams of bliss and happy anticipation he continued to indulge, until the return of her whose image, like his guardian angel, had, through those dreams, been hovering over him.

This delicious reverie was interrupted by the entrance of Henri, who now thought it full time to come and see if he were awake, and ask him how he felt himself. —“ Oh, I have been wishing so to come and sit and talk to you,” cried he, running over to the bedside, “ but you were in so sweet a sleep, that I would not have disturbed you for the world, nor my good uncle neither; and now I know you are better, for you look so handsome, and your cheeks are getting so rosy.”

“ I think your cousin Victoria was right,  
when

when she called you a flatterer," said De Willenberg.

"Now I will go this instant, and bring her and my mamma here, for I know they are both longing to see you, and you shall hear that she will repeat your own very words, 'that I have told the truth.'"

"Then they are come back from their walk, and how did they leave the poor child?" asked Theodore, not being yet informed of his death.

"Indeed," replied Henri, "I cannot tell you how very sad they looked when they came in, and told uncle they had seen the poor little boy prepared to be put in his coffin. I thought they would have burst into tears."

De Willenberg heard this intelligence with evident grief and concern, but guessing the motive from which it had been kept from him so long, his gratitude made him appear much less affected than he really was, when, ushered in by Henri,

his promised visitors entered his apartment.

On quitting his patient, the count had retired to the privacy of his library, to read over some letters, at his leisure, which he had that morning received, and one in particular from M. De Willenberg. His intentions relative to Theodore were exactly what the latter had been conjecturing, and he had indeed in view for him an event of no less consequence than his marriage with Victoria—an event that he had for some years past secretly contemplated, and which he now anxiously wished to bring about.

Count Herman was by no means the character which the appellation of “ a man of the world ” generally conveys an idea of ; every duty he owed to himself, as a man and as a father, he strictly fulfilled ; his bosom was the seat of virtues the most exalted, and sentiments the most rigorous

ous

ous to vice; all the sociable and amiable feelings of the good man, the affectionate father, and the sincere friend, were there centered, and there a principle of selfishness or illiberality was not to be found.

His partiality to Theodore originated in his infantile endearments, and as time rolled on, it was strengthened by the similarity of their dispositions. The birth of a son had never been granted to his wishes, often as he had sighed for one, and such a one as Theodore. The death of his beloved wife put a period to his lingering hopes; for, as he could never love, he had wisely resolved never to marry another; but a consolation yet remained to him—in witnessing the attachment of De Willenberg and Victoria, he formed the design of crowning their love, should it stand the test of time and absence, by an union, which would at once give him the son he so desired, and con-

tribute to the advantage and happiness of Theodore.

He had formerly been on terms of intimacy with the elder De Willenberg, who, having latterly grown into repulsive habits of moroseness and avarice, with all the characteristics of a heart not the best, the count, disgusted, weaned himself, by degrees, from his society, and at length gave up visiting him altogether; he was acquainted with the whole of his unreasonable conduct to his son, and well knowing his disposition, he did not entertain a hope that the will he had made, so hostile to him, would ever be repealed, though, for various reasons, he deemed it prudent to keep that opinion to himself, or at least not to put Theodore's happy visions to flight by revealing it to him.

The deserted state of the latter rendered him, if possible, still dearer to him, but,  
too

too noble-minded to make a boast of his friendship by words, none ever knew its extent till manifested by his actions, and of course none knew exactly what he had planned for Theodore.

The splendid offers of marriage that had been made to his daughter had gratified the vanity of a fond parent, but they had never led captive his better reason, excited ambition, or induced him, for a moment, to think seriously of sacrificing happiness to the glitter of nominal aggrandizement, or the temptations of riches. Dearer, far dearer to him, were the comfort and felicity of his child, which he knew no alliance that had yet offered would promote, and for this reason he sanctioned and approved of her having rejected them.

How unlike was he in this respect to our modern philosophers of the present day, who, with more pretensions, and fewer

real claims, to sense and reason, most prudently content themselves in their alliances, for the loss of every domestic happiness, and not unfrequently virtue, in the possession of titled grandeur, and the acquisition of the idol of their vain, avaricious, and mercenary hearts — wealth! But woe to the consciences, if such indeed they have, of those who basely barter thus all the real joys of human existence!

Such a thought had never tainted the conscience of count Herman; a great mind was, in his opinion, what made man truly noble; virtuous and amiable principles, and talents well directed, truly rich; and guided thus in selecting a husband for his daughter, Theodore De Willenberg was the one on whom his choice fell.

Previous, however, to his doing any thing decisive, he thought it proper to apprise his father, not from a belief that he could interest him much in his son's behalf,

behalf, or induce him to cancel a single line of his will, but because he deemed it a mark of respect due to him as a parent, however unworthy he might otherwise be.

The reply he received was just such a one as he expected—cold, formal, and reserved, but evincing throughout a steady and determinate adherence to the contents of his will, which he vowed no earthly power should ever lead him to alter. The prospect of his son's marriage he treated with almost perfect indifference, saying he was at liberty to marry when and whom he pleased, but must never expect his congratulations, or any assistance whatever from him, beyond the trifling sum already allowed him; and concluding with a request that he might never be addressed on the subject again.

This unfeeling composition more than ever disgusted the count against its author,

thor, but did not, for an instant, influence his determinations. He knew the grief and distress it would occasion to Theodore, should it, by chance, ever meet his eye, or a word of what it contained reach his ear; and resolved to consign it to oblivion, he flung it into a large blazing fire, with all the indignation it deserved.

CHAP-

CHAPTER VI.  
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Surely paradise is round me,
And every sense is full of thy perfection ;
To hear thee speak might calm a madman's frenzy,
Till by attention he forgot his sorrows. OTWAY.

THE attentions of his friends, and their cheerful society, shortly restored De Willenberg to his usual health and spirits. One of his first visits on going out, was to the cottage of his humble acquaintances, Dominique and his wife; the joy of the latter at seeing him almost amounted to ecstasy; but when he stretched forth his hand, and cordially took hers, it required no more to rouse into full action all the powers of her tongue. She had, in her turn, almost tendered her lips to salute him—she blessed him over and over again, and

and protested he was now more than ever like her "poor dear beautiful Jaques!"

During his absence, Victoria employed herself in finishing the picture, according to her design; she did so most completely to her satisfaction; it seemed to surpass all her former efforts, for never with any work of art had she taken so much pains before; and when it had received the last admirable touch of her brush, she hung it in the very spot in her boudoir that madame Bertonville had allotted to it.

In the meantime her aunt was closeted with count Herman, with whom she had sought a private interview, for the purpose of informing him of her conversation with our heroine, and urging him to bring matters to a more determinate state. To her surprise, she found him quite prepared to hear all she had to say on the subject, and ready to coincide in all her proposals—a circumstance she did not fail to take advantage

vantage of. She imparted unreservedly all that had passed between her and Victoria; and he in return opened his mind to her. He told her he had long projected the match; and should he find, on conferring with the parties concerned, that appearances had not deceived him, it should certainly take place. He readily guessed the motives of delicacy that had kept Theodore so long silent on the occasion, and could not but admire his magnanimity.—“It deserved,” he said, “a noble reward, and such it should have.”—M. De Willenberg had unnaturally cast him off, but he would adopt him, and to those two beloved children leave the vast fortune he had honourably accumulated through the course of a long and well-spent life, so that he deemed it perfectly immaterial whether chance might or might not ever alter the will in his favour. It was his wish that Theodore should be kept wholly ignorant of his cruel father’s determinations, fearing that the knowledge of them would

would induce him to form some pretext for rejecting even the woman he loved, rather than accept her, and be in his own opinion an unsuitable match for her—so honourable and sensitive were his feelings. In this the countess concurred; and at her suggestion, he resolved to break the matter to the lovers in a few days.

Our heroine received the first summons to her father's library, for a purpose her fluttering heart anticipated—there was an embarrassment in her manner as she entered, that betrayed that anticipation. The count perceived it; he took her hand affectionately, and seated her beside him, and then gently told her for what he had sent for her, entreating that she would answer him with her accustomed candour. His tones were kind and tender, yet firm and impressive. He briefly stated his observation of her attachment, adding, what she had hardly expected, that it was an attachment he highly approved of; he
painted

painting Theodore's recommendations in words of almost as high colouring as her own mind had done; but he bade her examine well her heart, and not mistake an enthusiastic admiration of those qualities, for the genuine affection she ought to feel for the man he wished to make the companion of her future days. Esteem, he said, was the solid foundation of the beautiful superstructure—love; without which, though it may for a while remain, yet must it, like a house built upon sand, eventually totter and fall; he knew how many ills, how many grievous ills, arise from hastily-formed marriages, and cautioned her against too quickly deciding. But that injunction was unnecessary; she *had* scrutinized her heart, and in all its various windings still did the image of Theodore everywhere present itself, equally amiable and beloved. Convinced of his worthiness, and anxious, if a shadow of doubt remained on her father's mind, to banish it thence as quickly as possible; encouraged

encouraged too by the winning cordiality of his manner, she was indeed as ingenuous as he wished her to be; she avowed her partiality to De Willenberg from its very commencement, through all its gradations, and freely confessed that she sincerely loved him. This was precisely what the count wished; he had now fully assured himself of all that it was necessary to be assured of on the subject, and it only remained to apprise him, who was the topic of their conversation, of the happiness that awaited him.

Madame Bertonville, delighted at the prospect of having her long-indulged wish thus accomplished, retired with her niece to her apartment, for there was yet one point on which she wished to speak to her.

The duke of Silesia's two last visits to the castle had given rise to different conjectures in all their minds; but the countess, in particular, guessed, and with a tolerable
share

share of truth, that it was not altogether a business of mere *politesse* on which he came, and with such a conviction, she became, more than the others, an unobserved observer. His attentions to Victoria, though not generally noticed by the rest, did not escape her acute observation, neither did the feelings that prompted them; and though his assumed liveliness, and apparent kindness, had concealed from her view his less amiable qualities; though she had found him a polished, conversable, and agreeable companion, still he was far from being such a man as she wished to make a serious impression on her niece. That he had *not* made such, was sufficiently obvious; but that was not enough; she wished her to be strictly guarded in her deportment to him—a precaution now more than ever necessary; not that she entertained a doubt of Victoria's prudence, but she knew that Leopold ardently admired her, and would probably seize the most trifling circumstance from which he might

might delude himself with the flattering hope of a return of that admiration. She was not blind to his jealousy of Theodore; and it occurred to her, that he would not scruple to gratify his own vanity at the expence, and to the annoyance, of his more fortunate rival, which she could neither expect nor wish that the latter should tamely bear.

Victoria promised her aunt, that she would faithfully attend to this, her discreet admonition; at the same time so to regulate her conduct, as not to prejudice her father against the duke, by any appearance of particular reserve.

Some days elapsed afterwards ere the count had an opportunity of communicating to Theodore what had passed, and the duke had paid them another visit. To superficial observers Leopold was often uncommonly pleasing and attractive; and the count, who never wished to look at the
the

the dark side of a picture, while there was a single charm on the light, worthy of his notice, was certainly prepossessed in his favour. He had never for a moment suspected him to be otherwise than De Willenberg's sincere friend, and as such, he concluded that the intelligence of any thing conducive to his advantage would be highly agreeable to him; judging thus, he had determined to acquaint him with all that was about to take place, and accordingly sought a proper time for doing so.

A dreadful anticipation of what he was about to hear, so much flurried the duke at first, that he narrowly escaped suspicion; but, deeply practised in dissimulation, he soon assumed an air of composure, and listened with apparent interest—at least with that sort of interest a person feels in learning the particulars of any thing he is resolved to counteract.

If the count had a weakness, it was the
evident

evident delight he experienced in praising, and hearing praised, his idolized daughter; her loveliness and her merits were ever his most favourite topics; and his indulgence of them now for some time kept his auditor in a state of agonizing suspense, half believing that his fears relative to Theodore were erroneous.

But through this uncertainty at length fell the blow, like a storm at first faintly seen gathering through the darkening clouds, and then suddenly bursting over us with tremendous violence. Leopold was not altogether prepared for it, but its effect was not visible to the count, who went on to state all he had done and intended still to do. The duke heard him to the end without interrupting him. This would have been a deathblow to the hopes of any body less a Machiavel than himself; but when the first shock was over, he quickly became collected, and
made

made up his mind as to how he should proceed.

He had first had it in contemplation to overthrow his rival's promised good fortune at once, by artful and cautious insinuations of his being secretly attached to another; but, on consideration, he abandoned this scheme for a yet deeper, and, he hoped, a safer one.

Fearful of exciting mistrust in the count, and so defeating his object, policy now led him into a different track; and instead of offering any argument against it, he applauded his lordship's generosity, and declared he longed to congratulate his friend on the bliss of being the husband of lady Victoria.

It was obvious to De Willenberg, that count Herman had something on his mind which he wished to impart to him—something, if he might judge from appearances,

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that

that was of no unpleasant nature. His bosom filled with delightful expectations—he longed for an opportunity to be informed of it, which shortly occurred, and which the other as eagerly embraced.

At this period he had been rather more than a month at the castle, and its inmates became every day more and more attached to him. Its lord already regarded him, and almost addressed him, as a son; and the domestics, like all others of that class, not failing to repeat, in their humbler circles, all they heard and saw in the higher ones in the drawing-room, it was soon predicted amongst them, that the handsome young visitor would be one of the future owners of their present stately abode.

Madame Bertonville had accustomed herself to the delightful and salutary recreation of a ramble before breakfast, in the adjacent plantations and tastefully-laid-out grounds about the castle, in which De
Willenberg

Willenberg and our heroine generally accompanied her.

They had returned one morning earlier than usual; and the ladies having retired to their apartments, to adjust themselves for breakfast, left his lordship and Theodore in the room by themselves, Henri being yet mounted, and prancing through the lawn, on a little pony, presented to him by his uncle.

“ My dear boy, you look a perfect picture of health and cheerfulness this morning,” observed the count, gazing with pleasure on Theodore’s animated countenance, to which cheerfulness and exercise had indeed given an unusually-fine colour; “ one might suppose you had been rambling through the Elysian fields, instead of mine, or that a refreshing dive into one of the fabled fountains had made you look so well; come, now, confess that you have been invoking the aid of some rural deity
K 2 hereabouts;”

hereabouts;" and a smile gave a playful archness to his words.

"I have certainly been conversing with them, my lord; in such society could I *feel* otherwise than happy—and *happy*, could I *look* otherwise than well?"

"May you long continue to look and feel so, my dear young friend!" aspirated the count, dismissing at once the *badinage* with which he had commenced.

"I am confident I shall, as long as I remain here; if kindness, hospitality, and friendship, could not make me look well and happy, I wonder what could?"

"You may talk of kindness and hospitality, if you please; *they* are what any guest of mine would naturally expect and demand; but, Theodore, you have yet to learn what my *friendship* is, and its extent."

A sensation, such as he had never felt before, thrilled through De Willenberg's agitated frame—the whole delightful truth
was

was now about to flash upon him with almost overpowering brightness—he could hardly support himself on his chair—it was not exactly a pleasurable emotion that he experienced, for excessive joy is often more painful than excessive grief—without seeming to intend it, he pressed his hand upon his left side, endeavouring to control the unbridled rapidity with which his heart beat, and awaited the rest in silence.

“Theodore, a friend is not always the one who with smiling looks throws open his doors to receive you—who entertains you at his table with luxuries, with superfluities, and with all the external graces of politeness; many there are who will do this, whose hearts are good and kind, as far as their passive virtues can make them so, yet know no more of friendship than the name—a name as often misapplied as beauty to a painted woman. A friend should feel an interest in your happiness

and welfare; and such do you behold in the one who now addresses you. Yes! these have been the objects of my thoughts; I will be your friend—your father!”

“My more than father!” exclaimed Theodore with energy, seizing the count’s hand, and grasping it with more than filial affection; “have not your actions, your very looks, already, in a thousand various ways spoken to me the sweet, sweet language of friendship?—yes, to my heart they spoke it, and that heart glows with gratitude and attachment to you. Oh! never till now have I felt half so acutely the cruelty, the injustice of the man who gave me being—a father must I call him?—*he* my father!—did he not rise up in open rebellion against nature’s self?—did he not, with savage force, tear asunder the sacred ties that united a parent to his child, and fling me from him, as he would have done some noisome weed, whose baleful exhalations sent forth death on every side?—did he not do all this, while you—you on whom

whom I had *no* claim, tendered to me your home—your friendship? Oh, my lord! my lord! of all—*all*, will my mind ever retain the impression more faithfully than marble does from the sculptor's steel—never can I forget it!”

A tear forced its way down his cheek, but it was a tear that did honour to his heart; and the count, as it fell on his hand, was almost subdued to tears also.

“Dear, dear Theodore, be composed,” said he, trying to force a cheering smile over his features, “you have much more to hear—we will not now talk of your father's cruelty—let us yet hope the best as far as regards *him*—listen at present to what relates to *me*, and listen with the same attention you would hear me with, were you already my son.”

The little adverb, “already,” told him all, but he remained silent.

“ Though I wished to keep from your knowledge, until now, the ultimate object I have in view, spite of that wish, my affection for you must frequently have evinced itself, yet was I repaid in knowing it to be reciprocal. Now, Theodore, by that friendship and affection I charge you to deal candidly with me—answer my question, as if the continuance of all you value on earth depended on your frankness. Has your bosom at any time felt a warmer sentiment than what it feels for *me*? To be more explicit—Have you ever felt, what you cannot feel for man, the yearnings of that passion with which we are all more or less inspired at some part of our lives—love?—Has any individual woman, handsome, amiable, and deserving, ever given a new turn to your feelings, or engaged your thoughts, your attention, and your admiration, more than the rest of her sex?”

De Willenberg saw plainly what he
aimed

aimed at, yet his natural diffidence forsook him not—"My lord!" he faltered, "my friend! (and that comprises all that man can be to man) you have enjoined me to be candid—I *will* be so—candour may sometimes be carried too far—should you think so, oh! pity, but do not, do not condemn me!—yes, count, there *is* one woman, the fairest, the most adorable of her sex!—one whom my heart and soul have dared to love—whose image is indelibly stamped here"—(laying his hand on his bosom)—"forgive my presumption if I venture to name her—that woman is your daughter, the lady Victoria!"

"Heaven be praised for this!" ejaculated the count; "all my earthly hopes are realized at last—yes! ye are worthy of each other, and each other ye shall have—a few weeks more, and ye shall be united for ever!"

"How! what say you, my lord?" demanded Theodore, in a tone of wild joy and agitation; and again snatching the

hand he had let drop—"unite the rich and lovely heiress of your noble house, to the poor, discarded, isolated De Willenberg! can you be in earnest?"

"Have I given you cause to think me otherwise?" asked the count, with momentary displeasure.

"Never, my lord, never! you have always——"

"Stay this impetuosity, and listen further. Though your father has for a while dismissed you from him (say *discarded*, if you will), *I* have not—I will wholly supply his place to you, until the seeds of natural affection shall again germinate in his breast; and when they *do*, when his paternal arms shall again open to embrace you, still shall I preserve my claim to your love—still shall I be your father also. Can you now say you are isolated?—no, no, Theodore, I know your heart is warm and sincere; therefore speak the language of sincerity—tell me at once that heart acknowledges all I have said."

"It

“ It does—it does indeed most proudly acknowledge it; and nought but its sentiments shall ever pass my lips.”

“ You are not *poor*, Theodore, for you possess those qualities that all the golden treasures of the opulent cannot purchase—nay, that blush shall not check me, for I too am sincere; and if such possessions content you not, your father and I have those that will. When you become the husband of my Victoria, who but yourselves shall have a right to share my wealth?—none—will you not *then* be rich? will you not have all that virtuous hearts can wish for, or the forms of this world require?”

“ Ah! all, in having her I love!—gold may minister to our worldly wants, but she is the treasure that, next to Heaven, my soul shall prize—my whole heart shall love.”

Approaching footsteps were now heard outside. De Willenberg had dropped

on one knee, and pressed the count's hand fervently to his lips.

“ Arise, my son, for by that endearing appellation I will address you ; at present I do not wish the subject of our conference to be known. Victoria herself is coming, and though to know it would gratify— would rejoice my child, still would it at this time embarrass her. I have told her *mine*, and heard *her* sentiments on the occasion already ; at a proper opportunity I will tell her the rest.”

Our heroine and her aunt now entered, followed by Henri, who, bouncing to the count's lap, told him—“ he was very angry with him for not having come to see how well he managed his pony ;” and turning to his mother, added—“ he was very angry with her also, for taking away cousin Victoria and Theodore into the plantation, instead of coming to admire his beautiful favourite.”

This

This in a great measure took their immediate attention from De Willenberg, so that whatever they might think had been passing, their thoughts at least did not betray themselves.

He was, however, not quite so much on his guard; elated and joyful, his corporeal functions seemed under the action of a being entirely new, and his buoyant spirits rose to such a pitch, that Victoria, when she withdrew with her aunt, to read in her *boudoir*, could not help observing—“how uncommonly lively and entertaining he was that morning, and how very well he looked!”

“He looks better and happier than I have ever seen him before, and I dare say is so in reality,” replied the countess, with some emphasis. She had, in truth, soon shrewdly suspected what had occupied her brother and De Willenberg; and so ingenious is suspicion in shewing itself in some shape or another, that Victoria immediately

mediately caught it from this significant expression.

Another interview with her father very soon followed. The rein was completely removed from the impatient tongues of attached domestics and sincere friends. Theodore was now our heroine's acknowledged lover, and even this happy pair seemed scarcely *more* happy than those around them.

Miss Barbara Chaterboix, in particular, *alias* Chatterbox, (into which her witty fellow-servants thought proper to translate her name, and not inaptly), *femme de chambre* to lady Victoria, was as loud and vociferous in her expressions of joy at the idea of a marriage in the family, as the respect she owed her young lady permitted. She was a native of France, a smart, smirking lass of four-and-twenty, possessing all the characteristics, divested of their refinements, of her fair countrywomen.

women. She talked incessantly, and, to an unconquerable aversion to keeping a secret, and a propensity to repeat all she heard said by others, she added a happy knack of embellishing it with many pretty little fictions of her own. Some old book she had contrived to read, the only book she could ever manage, by dint of hard labour and slow spelling, to get through, had furnished her otherwise vacant and frivolous mind with such an abundant store of proverbs and trite similes, that, as if endeavouring to exhaust the fund of them she had laid in, she usually contrived to introduce a long string of them, appropriate or not, to every body she spoke to, not even excepting her young lady. She gloried in being admired by the other sex, and flirted with them as often as she had an opportunity. Amongst other amiable foibles with which nature had gifted her, was a wish to distinguish herself, if possible, from the ignorant class of people ycleped servants, of which, unluckily, she
was

was herself one, by a praise-worthy affectation of the dignity, the manners, and the language of her superiors; in this last acquirement, however, she failed most lamentably. Any thing in the dictionary beyond common phraseology, seemed never intended for her use; but, with her wonted promptitude and good sense, if she could not remember the fine words she heard her lord and lady make use of, she never failed to substitute some others equally high-sounding, though unfortunately far different in their meaning. This ludicrous, but, in her opinion, highly-edifying talent, her fellow-domestics most assiduously encouraged; not indeed with the laudable desire of being edified, but the mischievous one of being entertained at the expence of poor Barbara, whose blunders and absurdities afforded them ample subjects in her absence for many a hearty laugh.

One, however, amongst them, philosopher-like, who knew how to make due allowances

allowances for the follies of womankind, not only at such times took her part, but was, to all intents and purposes, her devoted admirer. This was no other than Theodore's servant, Conrad, whom we have before had occasion to notice; and Conrad soon found that his manly person and handsome features had captivated the affections of the love-sick Barbara, who, now that her young lady was apparently on the eve of matrimony, looking into her list of outlandish phrases and undivulged secrets (pertaining to herself), and finding that she had actually passed her twenty-fourth year, thought it full time, with Heaven's will and Conrad's, to enter that blessed state herself, of which she took care to remind him.

The count's kindness and generosity did indeed make a sensible impression on De Willenberg, whose natural partiality to him now grew into all the fondness and affection of a son.

In

In this plenitude of joy, his father's severity and injustice almost vanished from his mind ; and what at any other time he would have shrunk from, he now resolved on doing, namely, writing to that father, to inform him and his beloved mother of his intended marriage, and once more implore his forgiveness and his blessing.

He deemed it unnecessary to consult the count on the subject, because, notwithstanding all his wrongs, he still held it one of a child's first duties to reverence the parent from whom he sprung ; and influenced by this amiable sentiment, he composed and quickly sent off his letter to its destination.

CHAP-

CHAPTER VII.

Ah, baleful gift of angry Heaven,
 When to the feeling wretch is given
 A soul alive to joy !
 Joys fly with every hour away,
 And leave the unguarded heart a prey
 To cares that peace destroy. GREVILLE.

ANOTHER week passed over, and still beheld our little party at the castle as happy as the circumstances we have related could make them. Theodore and Victoria seemed indeed the happiest of human beings; but our sublunary joys once arrived at their acme, when we have clambered the pleasing height, and through flowery paths reached its summit, alas! what a gloomy reverse often is the scene we contemplate below, and which we are fated to descend!

Here

Here was this picture sadly exemplified, for their happiness was too great to be of long duration.

They were all assembled round the breakfast-table one morning, when a letter, directed to De Willenberg, was handed to him by a servant. A prophetic cloud spread over his countenance, as a large black seal, and a superscription he too well knew, met his eye, which, rolling frightfully, ran over its contents, when he had, amidst innumerable and dreadful conjectures, torn it open. A deathlike hue blanched his cheeks; tears sent forth by mental agony trickled over them; his whole frame trembled; he attempted to speak, but the words died away unarticulated; his sight grew dizzy, and with difficulty he prevented himself from falling.

Consternation filled all present; in vain they inquired the terrible cause of his agitation, and sought to read the letter.

As

As if the very sight of it was too much to trust them with, he quickly put it in his pocket. At length groaning out—"I am undone!" he started from his chair, and rushed out of the room.

All their suppositions were vague and unsatisfactory; but the count, alarmed and hurried on by some impulses that he did not explain, immediately rose from the table, and followed him to his apartment, the door of which being ajar, he could see him, unobserved, before he reached it. At the first glimpse he caught of him, he paused, from Theodore's now increased and violent agitation, hesitating whether to enter, as it occurred to him that his presence might still more distress him, so that he resolved to stay where he was, to ascertain, if possible, by what might drop from him, the purport of this mysterious letter.

Let it not be imagined that idle or un-
manly

manly curiosity prompted him; his wish to be fully acquainted with an affair that so deeply and seriously affected him—*him* on whom he was so soon to bestow a father's blessing, was perfectly natural, and it was such as any other parent, possessing equal affection for his child, would have done.

With almost the frightful air of insanity, De Willenberg walked up and down the room. He held the open letter in his hand; sometimes fixing on it a vacant gaze of incredulity, then suddenly dashing it from his eyes, as if the conviction of some horrible truth rushed upon his mind—“Who—who can have done this?” he frantically cried.—“What demon can thus have worked my ruin? what horrid, horrid mystery is all this? *I* wrote not such—*my* pen never spoke reproof to him—*I* arraigned him not. Oh, Heavens! villainy, treachery most foul, has been at work against me, blighting my hopes
of

of happiness—blighting, said I?—it has overthrown, crushed, blasted them for ever! Dare I now, a poor mendicant, when every chance of my father's pardon is cut off—dare I now think of wedding the lovely woman, who, unconscious of my poverty, would, ere long, have accompanied me to the altar? No, no; I am, it is true, a beggar, but not that guilty wretch! There is a Power above that will avenge my wrongs. Yet why stand I thus listless and inactive, while mischief may still be plotting further against me? why do I not fly to have all explained—to seek revenge myself?—Yes, yes; I am now resolved—my plan is arranged, and it shall be done.”

With a little more composure he reperused the letter; then opening his bureau, he took out a sheet of paper, wrote a few lines, looked over them, and again struck his forehead with his hand in all the anguish of despair. As if disapproving of what

what he had written, he crushed the paper, and tore it into atoms. He took another sheet—ran over it with a hurried hand, then quickly sealed, directed, and put it in his pocket, evidently intending it for the post.

Unwilling to put him to additional pain by asking an explanation, which, if given at all, he judged would be reluctantly, the count perceiving him move towards the door, thought it better to avoid being seen by him, and hastened back to the breakfast-room. There he found his sister and daughter, anxiously awaiting his return, that they might learn all that had passed; but the little intelligence he had to give them, was ill calculated to dispel their apprehension.

They waited De Willenberg's coming a considerable time, but he not making his appearance, their fears rapidly increased.

“ My

“ My dear brother, had you not better question him at once upon this sad business?” said the countess. “ Do go to him again, and I am certain he will confide all to you.”

“ Indeed, Matilda, as he has not voluntarily made me his confidant, it would be painful to me, and equally so to him, if I were to solicit it; therefore do not urge me.”

“ Would to Heaven we could learn what has thus dreadfully affected him!” ejaculated Victoria; “ surely we might be of use to him—we would at least console him.”

“ I will at all events try to bring him back to you,” said the count; “ you may perhaps be able to draw him for a while from this terrible something that has so changed him;” and, quitting the room, he found the object of his search in the library. —“ Theodore, my dear Theodore,” said he, taking his hand, “ you know not surely the pain it gives your friends around

you, or you would not thus seclude and give yourself up to solitude, and this violent, this culpable excess of grief, be the cause what it may. Let me prevail on you to moderate it, and accompany me back to the saloon, where you must be aware I have left madame Bertonville and our dear Victoria, in a state of the most torturing anxiety about you, which your continued absence every moment augments.”

“ Oh, my lord, they are too kind—they are indeed too kind in feeling anxious about *me*. I am now——” He suddenly checked himself, or all would have been divulged.—“ My lord, solitude is at present the only palliative my sorrows will admit of; they are of too sensitive a nature to bear a remedy less gentle.” Still he betrayed not his secret; nor did the count evince a desire to know it, though such a desire he most earnestly felt.

“ If it is your wish to be alone, my beloved boy, I will leave you for a while ;
but

but I can by no means suffer you to remain long so. Promise me that you will join us in the course of the morning, and meantime I will order Conrad to prepare breakfast here for you.”

“ No, no, my lord, do not trouble him—do not let the affectionate creature know what an effect this morning’s letter has had upon me. His efforts at consolation would be irksome and distressing to me, without at all alleviating my wretchedness, and he himself would be miserable at seeing me thus. I require no breakfast—I have food here for deep meditation, and more I could not now digest.”

“ Say then you will come to us by-and-by.”

“ I will, my lord ; in a couple of hours hence expect me. I shall then be more tranquil, and reflection will, I hope, have reconciled me to a misfortune that is now irremediable. I will bear the blow with fortitude ; but if *treachery* has dealt it, it shall not go unpunished.”

Again his feelings were hurrying him on, but again he bridled them.

“Treachery !” echoed the count, thrown for a moment off his guard by the emphatic word—“treachery ! what mean you ?”

“Nothing, nothing, count,” replied Theodore, angry with himself for having said so much ; but there *was* more meaning in the expression than he durst now explain ; “my tongue is often in a babbling humour, and utters strange and incoherent things, all meaning nothing.”

Propriety forbade another interrogatory ; the count left him to himself, and returned, sad and dejected, to the saloon.

At the promised hour he emerged from his seclusion, and found the ladies in the music-room. Madame Bertonville was seated at her embroidering frame, and Victoria was tormenting herself by making blunders, and rubbing them out again, in a landscape,

a landscape she had partly sketched on the preceding day. Never had her pencil been less skilfully guided than now; and while she tried to appear all attention, never before had her mind played truant so completely from the occupation of her hands. She and her aunt rose from their seats as De Willenberg entered.—“My dear Theodore,” said the latter, “I rejoice to see you looking something like yourself again. You cannot think how much your running away at breakfast-time alarmed us! As to Victoria, she has really done nothing but mope about ever since.”

“Nay, my good aunt, don’t say that. Did I not, at your own request, read you the remainder of that vapour-giving volume—‘The Sorrows of Werter?’”

“And truly a hopeful way you read it! even little count Bertonville here smiled once or twice at your amusing blunders.—Did you not, Henri?”

L 3

“Indeed

“ Indeed I own I did, mamma ; but, after all, it was not fair to laugh, for I am sure we were all thinking of Theodore as well as she.”

“ Come, come, Henri, I certainly did not make such a blunder as to tell *you* my thoughts,” said Victoria, colouring deeply.

“ You must allow,” said the lively countess, “ that he puts the most favourable construction on the matter.”

“ His opinion is always favourable to *me*,” observed De Willenberg.

“ That is because I like you so much, and because you are so soon to be my cousin also.”

“ Never, never !” sighed Theodore to himself, and his heart was ready to burst with agony. He moved towards the sofa, and trying to conceal his emotion, took up a book that lay on it ; it was a volume of Moliere’s plays.

“ Oh,” said Henri, running over, “ that is the pretty book that made me laugh so
much

much yesterday. Do now, Theodore, read some more of it, and you must laugh too, for I don't like to see you so very sad."

He did not recollect how inappropriate was the task he assigned him; but Theodore was one of those amiable beings who wish not to communicate to others the infection of sadness, and opening the book, he endeavoured to command as much composure as would enable him to read audibly.

For the first time this favourite genius of comedy was irksome to him; in vain poor Scapin practised all his arch tricks and knaveries—not a smile did they elicit, for, seeing Theodore melancholy and abstracted, the others were sympathetically so.

He was somewhat relieved by the entrance of count Herman, with a packet of
L 4 music,

music, which had just arrived from Warsaw for Victoria.

The count saw by their looks that De Willenberg had avoided speaking of the letter, and wishing, if possible, to divert his thoughts from it, he opened the parcel; and turning over the leaves of several beautiful songs, concertos, and sonatas, asked him if he did not think them well selected?

The latter, who was an enthusiastic lover of music, and performed on two or three instruments, divining the count's kind motive, expressed his admiration of them; and to cheer his friends, affecting a gaiety he by no means felt, read over several bars.

In arranging some of them, Victoria found a little Italian duetto, which she and De Willenberg had often practised together; and placing it on the music-frame
of

of the harpsichord—"There, Theodore," said she, "is my sweet favourite, with variations, and you must positively sing it with me now. I shall quarrel with you in good earnest if you are not perfect in it, and expose you as a most hopeless pupil."

He smiled faintly as he approached the instrument where she was seated—"Sooner than hazard your ladyship's displeasure, I will exert myself," said he, and an involuntary sigh declared that to sing would indeed be an exertion to which he was now hardly competent.

Through the first few bars, which were a lively bravura, he acquitted himself with a tolerably-good grace; but a thrilling cadence sinking their voices into a slow and melancholy measure, his efforts to continue the feeling and pathos it required, completely failed, his agitation nearly subdued him, and reddening with confusion, he was obliged to declare that he could proceed no farther.

Pitying, and anxious to relieve him from his embarrassment, the count proposed an excursion through the grounds, to view some improvements that had been lately made, to which all consented; but exercise had not its accustomed salutary effect upon De Willenberg—he returned the same, and withdrew to his apartment, whence, even more dejected than before, he rejoined the family at dinner:

Assembling at this meal was, however, now a mere matter of form, for none felt inclined to partake of it; and after little more than tasting it, it was dismissed.

The absence of the ladies, who were gone to take their afternoon's nap, left Theodore again alone with the count; but both were as silent as before on the subject of the letter, and both wished secretly what they had never wished before—their *tête-à-tête* at an end.

Victoria

Victoria appeared to have guessed that wish, for she soon returned, but unaccompanied by her aunt. In a few minutes afterwards a servant entered, saying madame Bertonville was in the library, and requested an interview there with the count, who, hastening to his sister, left De Willenberg alone with the very one he least wished to be left with—Victoria.

A long and painful silence ensued; both wished to speak, yet each wished the other to speak first.

Victoria justifiably believed she had a claim upon the confidence of the man her father had chosen to be her husband, and thought that could she once draw it forth, it would considerably lighten the burden that so weighed upon his spirits.

With a proper proportion of good sense, was blended in her all the real delicacy and refinement—all the retiring modesty, that

render the female character truly amiable. Her bosom was devoid of every thing like the fastidious and disgusting prudery that would have led some women to start with horror and surprise at the bare idea of soliciting, under any circumstances, the confidence of a man.

“ Oh, woman, woman! oh, strangely-mingled race! in how many various shapes hath capricious nature moulded you! Different as the ranks and occupations she hath assigned you through life, are the characteristic qualities, the virtues and the vices, the errors and defects—nay, the very perfections, she hath given to each. Lovely, fascinating woman! whose smile is a spell over the heart of man, for whose happiness and delight thou wert sent on earth—a charm, when emanating from a virtuous soul, from which no power can disen-
thral him. Never indeed are you half so lovely as when the soft and gentle blush of timidity beams upon your cheek, and
graceful

graceful modesty is the halo that shines around you—never less so than when that brightness fades, for with it fades that charm by which you hold us.

Affectation is the monster that can cloud the beauty of the finest form, and pervert the qualities of the noblest mind. Surely then if woman did but see it in its naked and sickening deformity, she would shrink from imitating—nay, from the very thought of an object so loathsome, as she would flee at sight of the poisoned basilisk. Such a thing Victoria had never known; she followed the dictates of her unsophisticated heart, and those dictates were seldom wrong.

With one of her sweetest, most resistless looks—a look of sympathy, tenderness, and love, she approached the table where, almost unconsciously, De Willenberg was leaning, with his head resting on his hand.—“Theodore,” said she, “I cannot longer
in

in silence regard you thus melancholy— thus changed from your former self. Your griefs, I fear, are of no common nature; yet surely to confide the cause of them to the one you profess to love, will diminish their poignancy, and my participating will render them less difficult to be borne; or should they be less serious than I apprehend, and sympathy avail not, why then I must fairly rally you out of them.”

A look, strongly expressive of gratitude, of more than gratitude, was the only reply he could for some time make; he would have taken her hand, and carried it to his lips, but he recollected himself, and his usual firmness withheld him from the action.—“*Profess* to love you!” he reiterated, gaining more command over himself; “oh, lady, I *did* profess it! and, alas, alas! too deeply I *felt* what I professed. Had I *not* loved you, I could, with comparative indifference, have borne this blow; did I not love you still, few things could have changed me thus. But what madness is this

this I am hurrying into? No, no, I dare not longer profess—dare not longer feel for you a sentiment that would be now so presumptuous in me. I did fondly, fervently love you, but I must do so no more; delusion has long sported with my senses, but my dream of happiness is at an end.”

“For Heaven’s sake, Theodore, what mean you?” she demanded, in a voice not less agitated than his. “You are plunging still deeper and deeper into mystery. You are not capricious, therefore your words must have some terrible meaning. *Why* should you not love me yet?—*what* is the delusion you fancy? Think you I have made vows but to trifle with you, and break them to turn your attachment into jest? or think you——”

“Oh, no, no, Victoria, I never thought so; Heaven forbid I should have so wronged you! The very strength and purity of your affection augment my misery; for to preserve myself from the censure of my own heart, I must—I must cease to love—
cease

cease to think of you! I am no longer worthy of you, and my love must make a desperate sacrifice to rectitude."

"Explain all this, I beseech you, Theodore! keep me not in such agonizing suspense. *How* is it you are unworthy of me?"

"This morning's letter sealed my doom; all hope of my father's forgiveness is at an end; but do not—do not ask me more; I could refuse you nothing, and should but reveal what is yet uncertain even to myself; this painful, dreadful fact alone is all I dare trust to another. I am ruined—beggared. My cruel father has willed all—all his property far from my reach for ever! even the miserable pittance hitherto allowed me is wrested from me. I am now little beyond the mendicant who depends on public charity for subsistence, for all *my* dependence is on the fluctuating chances of a military life. But a few days ago, and oh, what hopes—what sweet, delightful, radiant hopes dawned upon me! Alas!
the

the sun of my happiness soon set in clouds of never-ending sorrow, or that will end but with my life."

"And what of all this, Theodore? If the unnatural being you still term your father has forsaken and robbed you of your rights, is there not one who claims that appellation from you in reality? *My father is yours—my wealth, in being mine, is yours—my happiness, I trust, will also be yours, and, possessed of these, what more have we to wish for?*"

"Nothing, nothing more, Victoria, if those I *dare* possess. But assuredly you would not marry a beggar?"

"Theodore, this language is ungenerous—it is ungrateful; I expected it not from the man I gave my affections to, unbiassed by a sordid or a mercenary thought—from the man whose vows of love were pledged to me in the very face of Heaven. But, signor, if you wish to retract those vows (and the duke's artful insinuation now rushed upon her memory)—if your heart has

has

has indeed chosen another, and a worthier object, then I conjure you say so; drop at once this mask, and tell me plainly, candidly, that you wish all attachment between us to cease for ever."

"*Wish* it to cease!" he repeated, while a tear started to his eye. "No; I cannot do injustice to my feelings—I cannot say so; though, for both our sakes, it were better if such an attachment did not exist."

"How were it better? If you do not wish so, think you the injustice of another towards you can lessen you in my esteem? if you *do*, you know me not. Little indeed must the mind be to which real worth and goodness, devoid of riches and power, bring not their own recommendation."

"Enough! dearest Victoria!" exclaimed he, her amiable arguments overcoming all his fears and all his scruples; "to be loved by you is still my glory—the very summit of my ambition; I cannot—will not deny it, nor that my love for you is as ardent and sincere as ever. Do not
wrong

wrong me by believing for a single moment that it is in the power of any mortal to wean my affections from you ; they are still all your own ; I will hope, again hope for promotion, and then——”

He was just about to say what would have unfolded the whole letter to her, but the timely return of the count and madame Bertonville checked him, and for several moments he remained silent.

They strove to wear out the remainder of this tedious evening by a disjointed sort of conversation. Each tried to be cheerful, in order to make the others so ; but their gaiety was forced, and did not last long.

As the hour for separating for the night approached, Theodore became more pensive and abstracted than he had yet been ; but when the moment for saying “good-night” arrived, his excessive agitation almost

most alarmed them; he could hardly pronounce it, and he threw himself on a chair, unable, for a few minutes, to articulate any thing.

“Good God! you are ill—very ill, Theodore!” said madame Bertonville, wiping with a handkerchief the cold moisture that had overspread his forehead. “You must take something to compose you before you go to bed.”

“What *can* compose my distracted mind at such a time as this?” he cried, raising his hand to conceal the tears that trembled in his eyes. Recollecting himself, he added—“I must not indulge this weakness—I am ashamed of it. But all may soon be well.”

“God grant it, my dear boy!” said the count, pressing De Willenberg’s hand, who arose to endeavour to tear himself away. The effort was a violent and agonizing one, but he succeeded; and not
daring

daring to trust himself with another look at Victoria, he faltered out—"Good-night!" and precipitately left the room.

Victoria's terrors gave a frightful import to his words; a thousand horrible fancies took possession of her, and it was with much difficulty her father and the countess could so far argue her out of them, as to persuade her to retire to rest. She withdrew at length to her apartment, and laid her aching head upon her pillow, but not to sleep; repose shed not this night its sweet and gentle soporific over her disturbed senses; her thoughts chased it from her, for she knew that De Willenberg enjoyed it not. In this state of restlessness and apprehension she continued the whole of the (to her) unusually-long night; and heated and unrefreshed, she descended next morning to the breakfast-room, where she expected to meet Theodore as dejected and unhappy as the day before.

He

He was not there when she entered. The gloomy and spiritless cast of her features changed suddenly to a deep expression of alarm, which was also visible in the count and madame Bertonville. She faintly inquired if he had yet left his bedroom; and being answered in the negative, a half-suppressed exclamation of fear escaped her, and almost mechanically she took a seat.

For a long time all was perfect silence, except at intervals disturbed by their sighs, or the measured steps of the count, as he paced to and fro in evident perturbation.

The accustomed breakfast-hour was long past, and still De Willenberg came not; and no longer able to endure conjecture for his absence, count Herman hastened to seek him in his apartment.

On reaching the door he tapped gently, and listened to ascertain if he was still
asleep.

asleep. Not a sound was heard within ; the silence of the grave seemed to reign there. He delayed yet a moment, but all was as before ; and in expectation of some horrible event, he wildly burst open the door.

The most frightful spectacle would now have less appalled him than the terrible certainty that Theodore was not there. As if doubting the evidence of his senses, he gazed and regazed around, until his eyes appeared ready to start from their sockets ; but in vain he gazed—in vain Theodore's name resounded through the lofty suite of rooms ; he was indeed gone ! His bed had not been slept on ; every thing was in the same order as on the preceding evening, but whither, or for what mysterious purpose, he had departed, it was impossible to guess.

An opposite door led into a dark and extensive gallery, which had been almost entirely

entirely shut up for some years past, and from the further extremity of which a narrow staircase wound round the tower that terminated it. Opening this door, the count again called Theodore's name, but the echoes from the long and winding passages beneath, were the only sounds he heard in answer. He descended the stairs, and found the door at the bottom closed, but the rusty bolts drawn back, from which it was evident that it had been lately opened, and through it he entered the forest with which it communicated. Still calling him—still hoping the sound might somewhere reach his ear, he sought the fugitive De Willenberg in every part of this woody labyrinth.

Another hour thus passed away, and then, in the most agitated state of mind, he returned to the castle, to impart the dreadful intelligence that Theodore was nowhere to be found.

In

In the meantime, Victoria and her aunt had waited, with a tolerable share of composure, in the saloon, until some of the intervening doors being opened, Theodore's name, pronounced by the count, reached their anxiously-listening ears. From this they concluded that De Willenberg was not in his bedroom.

No responsive voice was heard, and impatient at the count's delay, they both repaired to the deserted chamber; but there no human being, save themselves, was visible. What might have occurred they waited not to conjecture. The door into the gallery, and that at the bottom of the staircase, lay wide open, and they unhesitatingly proceeded through the forest in search of them, thinking it the most likely place to find them in.

They had not gone far, when they met the count, attended by Conrad and another of the servants, who, having been

on some business to a neighbouring village, were crossing through the forest by a nearer path home than the road was, and hearing his lordship's voice amongst the trees, had ventured to interrogate him as to the cause of the emotions that shook his whole frame.

Conrad's astonishment and grief at the flight of his beloved master was little short of frenzy, but the most melancholy and most difficult task was to communicate it to Victoria and the countess. The scene that then ensued no language could convey a just idea of; every part of the castle, every place contiguous to it, were searched, and searched in vain. Theodore had indeed fled, perhaps for ever fled; or, oh yet more horrible possibility, perhaps had, driven to it by despair, done some rash, some fatal, terrible deed—committed suicide!

The bare idea sent such a general sensation

sation of horror through the house, that every thing possible seemed to them every thing probable, and such a probability as this last gained so strong an ascendancy over the minds of the domestics, that they soon held it as a decided thing, that the young senor had fallen by his own hands. Impressed with a firm belief of this, a body of them sallied forth, with different implements, to drag all the ponds, lakes, and rivulets with which the place abounded; not a cavity, whose waters could cover a human body, was left unexplored; but all—*all* was fruitless, and they returned more disheartened, and more terrified, than they had been before.

Ever ready to seize upon any thing bordering on the mysterious or the marvellous, they now did not hesitate to suggest every extravagant idea that could find a place in their extravagant heads, as the causes of his flight; and Barbara very sagaciously affirmed that *la jeune*

demoiselle Klopstock, to whom his father had betrothed him, had, in all likelihood, died, for the dreadful and vindictive purpose of spiriting him away, just as he was going to be married to another. The others were now, however, too much absorbed in real sorrow to laugh, as they usually did, at her absurd fancies. But though she talked thus idly, she possessed a good heart, and was as sincerely grieved as any of them.

Passing again through Theodore's chamber, count Herman observed on a table a small sealed packet, which he had before overlooked. Eagerly seizing it, with the hope of its affording him some clue towards a discovery, he found it directed to himself, and in Theodore's handwriting. He was just on the point of tearing it open, when part of the superscription arrested him, and he read the following words:—

“ To

"To the count Herman.

"Should you see no more of the unfortunate Theodore within three days, open this, and it will explain all."

Conjecture was now at an end; in the count's mind the frightful ills he had feared were verified.—"Oh, horrible, horrible confirmation of all I dreaded!" exclaimed he, as the packet dropped from his trembling hand; "even ere this the worst may be over, and Theodore no longer within the reach of human power to make him my son."

He groaned aloud at the horrors his alarmed imagination had engendered, and madame Bertonville, who was passing through the corridor outside, rushed in to see what was the matter. The packet lay on the floor, and picking it up, she read the same ill-boding lines, and formed the

same conclusions; but from what all this might have originated, neither of them could decide. How to quiet Victoria's apprehensions was the next question; they dared not think of yet opening the letter; and to tell her of the injunction on its envelope would be, not to tranquilize them, but to augment them perhaps into much more terrible certainty.

Judging it advisable to conceal it from her knowledge altogether, the count locked the letter in his bureau; and the better to keep her from suspecting the extent of this misfortune, they forced upon themselves an air of composure, very incompatible with the state of their feelings, and calmly suggested to her, that, had De Willenberg torn himself away for any considerable length of time, he would surely have left some explanation for his absence behind. But their reasoning, and their arguments, were lost upon Victoria; she easily penetrated their motives, and she

she feared that the evil was greater, much greater, than they chose to allow.

This day was one of the bitterest sorrow, and the deepest gloom, that Herman Castle had ever witnessed; amongst all its inhabitants, from the humblest to the most exalted, the same grief and dejection, the same tearful eyes, bore testimony to the worth of him whose unaccountable absence they lamented. How sad and dreary was the blank it left! how totally cheerless felt every bosom, devoid of the pleasure that the amiable De Willenberg's presence never failed to inspire! Their darling favourite was gone—gone perhaps for ever! and who was now to enliven their tedious hours?—None; for none indeed seemed inclined to dispel the clouds of melancholy in which they had wrapt themselves.

Victoria was almost inconsolable; until this occurrence, the strength of her attachment

ment had never been fully displayed; and the conviction that she had lost the object of it, when she was on the eve of possession, required more philosophy than even her accomplished mind was furnished with, to support it with any thing like tranquillity.

As evening drew near, that serene and pleasing period of the day when Theodore's fascinating gaiety and liveliness were wont to give brilliancy even to the deepening shadows of twilight, when the family circle were accustomed to assemble at their various elegant and interesting occupations, amusing and amused, her dejection increased.

No Theodore was there now to enliven them—perhaps never would be again. Every pulse throughout her frame throbbed fainter and fainter; and trembling at such a probability, she was obliged to exert herself to retire to the solitude of
her

her own apartment, there to give way to the feelings of her overcharged heart, in a long-continued flow of tears.

END OF VOL. I.

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DE WILLENBERG;

OR,

THE TALISMAN.

A TALE OF MYSTERY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY I. M. H. HALES, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF THE ASTROLOGER.

Such is the weakness of all mortal hope,
So fickle is the state of earthly things,
That ere they come into their aimed scope,
They fall so short of our frail reckonings,
And bring us bale and bitter sorrowings,
Instead of comfort, which we should embrace—
This is the state of Cæsars and of Kings.
Let none, therefore, that is in meaner place,
Too greatly grieve at any his unlucky case. SPENSER.

VOL. II.

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1821.

RECEIVED CITY 1901

RECEIVED CITY

DE WILLENBERG.

CHAPTER I.

Each lonely scene shall thee restore;
For thee the tear be duly shed;
Beloved till life can charm no more,
And mourned till pity's self be dead.

COLLINS.

SOMEWHAT relieved by a free indulgence of her tears, and knowing that immersing herself thus would depress her still more, Victoria sought her father in his library, whither he had withdrawn to ruminate over the events of the day. He was extended at full length on a couch, in the darkest part of the room; and until she

VOL. II.

B

stood

stood close beside him, she did not perceive that he was asleep. Deep and frequent sighs escaped him, and convinced her that the object of his waking thoughts was also that of his slumbering ones. He started several times, and moaned in all the anguish of mental misery. The sight of her beloved parent in such a state was even worse to her than what she had herself suffered, and had power to steal her thoughts for a moment from De Willenberg.

Fearful of awaking him to the sad reality of his dreams, she was softly retiring, when an involuntary motion of his arm disengaging his hand from the breast of his vest, in which it had been wrapped, at the same moment a letter fell from him on the floor; but he awoke not. It was the ominous packet De Willenberg had left, and which he had, overcome by anxiety and apprehension, imprudently opened and read. An idea that it *was* such instantly
flashed

flashed over Victoria's mind—that it had been written by her Théodore, and might reveal his fate. The possibility of learning from it all she wished, all she dreaded to know, urged her on to what she would, in any other case, have shrunk from. She cautiously took it up—the superscription verified her forebodings—it was indeed her lover's handwriting, and impatiently throwing aside the envelope which loosely covered the letter, her eye began to devour its contents. She had not proceeded half through it, when a deathlike faintness seized her; completely unnerved, she let it drop, and, with a piercing cry, fell senseless beside the couch.

Roused by the noise, her father instantly started up, and raised her inanimate form in his arms, and horror-struck at the discovery she had made, he snatched up the fatal letter. In all the wildness of anticipation of some additional calamity, madame Bertonville now rushed in; her

looks sufficiently demanded an explanation, and the count was reluctantly obliged to acknowledge his indiscretion.

This was however no time for expostulation; Victoria required prompt assistance, and the bell was rung to summon some of the domestics. By proper remedies she was slowly restored to animation; but the faculty of reason returned not with it; her countenance wore an expression almost of frenzy, and she tried to tear herself from the supporting arms of her aunt, who wept bitterly as she leaned over her. She fancied her lover lying before her, dead—murdered! and she shuddered fearfully at the frightful vision; then again her imagination brought his bleeding form back to life; she tried to grasp the airy shadow, and uttered exclamations of frantic joy, as if he stood beside her alive and safe.

The paroxysm at length subsided; her senses became clearer, and, overcome by
the

the violence of her sufferings, she shed a fresh torrent of tears, and sank gradually into a state of calmness and resignation. She was conveyed to bed, and by the aid of some composing medicine, administered to her by her aunt, a profound and tranquil sleep came on, favourable to her recovery, and the countess watched anxiously beside her, until the dawning morning indicated to her the necessity of seeking the refreshment of sleep for herself.

Victoria was as well, and as composed, on the succeeding morning, as she could be expected to be, on an occasion so trying to her fortitude; and the count and countess concealed the wretchedness of their own hearts, in order to soothe hers more effectually into pious submission to whatever might have befallen De Willenberg.

They were themselves not without a gleam of hope, and this it was that lighted
B 3 them

them through the dreary day that followed; but again the gloom of night came on, and Theodore came not with it. Like a fell storm that comes in spring, blasting all Nature's reviving beauties, so did the close of day now banish their hopes, and so fell the final blow like it, spreading nothing around but horror and desolation.

A report reached the castle, that De Willenberg had some hours before been assassinated by banditti.

Between Herman Castle and the town of Zersk, where Theodore's regiment was at this time stationed, with its royal commander, the duke of Silesia, and which was at some leagues distance, lay an ancient and extensive forest, through which, though it was the nearest way to pass to Zersk, it was universally known to be dangerous to every traveller that ventured into its frightful and intricate labyrinths, many parts of it preserving the darkness
of

of midnight, and especially from the formidable bands of marauders that infested its secret caverns and recesses. So general were the prejudice and terror existing against it, that it had long received the signal appellation of the Forest of Death. None dared reside in its vicinity, and all those who did live nearest, scrupulously avoided advancing a step further towards it, always taking a circuitous road, whenever they had occasion to go to their town.

Through some channel from this forest, a communication of the murder of De Willenberg had undoubtedly been made, and was as unquestionably believed. Had a thunderbolt fallen from heaven, carrying destruction with it, the count and his sister would have been less appalled than at this intelligence, surpassing almost all that they had yet ventured to conjecture.

Who, amid this scene of horror and consternation, would have idly preached philosophy

osophy as an antidote to a calamity so tremendous? None but the hardened and unfeeling stoic, the stern misanthrope, who, fancying himself better or wiser than the rest of his erring species, has retired from the world, to condemn the follies in which he himself has shared, to prescribe to the human heart new laws, new doctrines, new ethics, to which his prejudices and his resentment alone have given birth.

None of the inhabitants of Herman Castle possessed a heart so stoical, or indeed so fortified by *any* other feeling, as to be able to resist the weight of such repeated and such dreadful blows to their domestic peace, and this last entirely overturned every thing like resignation they had begun to feel to the first. Their immediate efforts were directed to guard it from Victoria's knowledge, and as she had not left her chamber all day, it was the more easily concealed from her.

From

From having sat up with her niece during the whole of the preceding night, madame Bertonville felt so languid and unwell, that both the count and Victoria now decidedly protested against the necessity of her doing so again. The latter, in fact, did not appear in actual need of an attendant through the night, being, as she said herself, certainly much better; but as they would not hear of her being left altogether alone, it was fixed that her maid Barbara should remain with her for at least two or three hours, and retire to bed when she saw her young lady in a sound and comfortable sleep.

The garrulous *femme de chambre* had not been allowed to disturb her all day by her accustomed prattle, and, like an impetuous torrent of water suddenly stemmed, and ready to burst forth at the first outlet with renewed violence, so was she ready to pour all she had gleaned, and all she had, for the last twenty-four hours,

B 5

been,

been debarred from telling, into the first ear that was ready to listen to her. Here then she thought was an admirable opportunity, and she eagerly accepted the post assigned her. Even the powerful emotions excited by the belief of De Willenberg's having been murdered, were not sufficient to restrain her loquacity, and it was with much difficulty she could so far obey the injunctions she had received from the count and madame Bertonville, as to keep her countenance from proclaiming at once all she had heard. She found Victoria in a light slumber, and being thus precluded from talking aloud, she began to mutter to herself in a low tone, but not so indistinct as not very soon to awaken her lady, which she by no means regretted.

Our heroine's first inquiry was, whether any thing had yet been heard of De Willenberg? and she stammered out a reply in the negative, as well, and with as much
plausibility,

plausibility, as her inclination to reveal the whole affair would permit.

Again Victoria closed her eyes, and was again roused by Barbara, who, impatient to talk of something, remarked, that she wondered what that very terrible letter contained, that could make him run off in such a manner. But this manoeuvre to gratify her curiosity not succeeding, she hit upon another expedient—"If I knew what that same letter was about," said she; "I could guess—ay, I could say for certain which way he went, and something more about him into the bargain; as to searching anywhere hereabouts for him, it is like looking for a needle in a bundle of straw, or going to the goat's house to look for wool—that I am sure and certain of."

"Tell me, tell me, I beseech you, if you know any thing of him!" exclaimed Victoria, half-starting from her bed. "Oh, where is he?—speak!"

"Speak! why, my dear young lady,
B 6 that

that is just what I want to do; but there is an old saying—a sorrowful face brings bad news.”

“ For mercy’s sake, Barbara, explain yourself at once! What additional bad news have you to tell me?”

“ Now, my sweet lady Victoria, don’t look so scared, though, to be sure, one can’t help being so; and, for my part, I am——”

“ To what does all this lead, Barbara?”

“ Oh, lady, lady, misfortune never comes alone, as I said the other day, when I fell in the mud, and cut my face, and spoiled my new tiffany into the bargain; I had made it up only a few days before, *à la mode de Paris*. But what do you think has happened?”

“ I cannot, dare not, guess. Tell me briefly, I implore you.”

“ You know the old forest between this and Zersk, and people don’t speak over and above well of it.”

“ To the point, Barbara; torture me not with such digressions.”

“ Well,

“ Well, as I was saying, your ladyship knows that same forest is full of banditti, God bless us! and what does the senor De Willenberg do, but he must needs try to pass through it, and——”

Victoria trembled from head to foot, and again sank back on her pillow; and Barbara, seriously alarmed, and regretting her having said any thing about it, made a violent effort to check herself.—“ Oh, my beloved young lady, be calm, I beseech you,” cried she, starting from her seat; “ let us hope the dear senor is happy, and lives.”

“ Lives!” echoed Victoria; “ assure me of it! say that word again! let me seize the hope, as the drowning wretch who seizes on any thing for safety!”

“ He lives in a better world, I trust, lady,” faltered Barbara.

“ Add not the rest!” exclaimed Victoria, with the wild air of insanity; “ my fancy draws the frightful picture! I see him wounded—dead! I will fly to my
Theodore,

Theodore, bind up his bleeding wounds, and in these arms enshroud him for ever from the tomb's relentless jaws! far and near shall revenge proclaim his death, and the murderers, the blood-hound fiends, who dared to strike the blow, shall feel my vengeance, and learn from it, that though hell's fit inhabitants may war amongst themselves, Heaven never decreed that demons should thus desolate the earth, making mankind their prey."

Barbara now deeply repented her indiscretion; but it was too late, and she could only endeavour, if possible, to repair it. She waited until the violence of the shock was somewhat abated, and then gently approached her.

As she had hoped, a copious gush of tears followed, and knowing that they generally relieved her, she did not venture to restrain them. Victoria then sank for a while into a state of silent and thoughtful

ful

ful melancholy, which her attendant did not interrupt by a single word.

As if slowly awaking from a reverie, her lips again breathed forth her lover's name; she was evidently so abstracted as to be wholly unconscious that there was any body present, while Barbara nevertheless perceived that her senses were again under the guidance of reason.

“ It was Heaven's will,” sighed she, “ to pour this affliction on us, and its will that we should calmly bear it. These—these are the blows that try a Christian's patience; and as we bear them, so will our rewards be proportioned in heaven hereafter—in a world beyond the grave, free from sin and sorrow; there shall I meet my Theodore—there, where all is peace and joy, and we shall love and live for ever. Yes, with all a Christian's firmness, will I submit to this direful stroke of fate; not a murmur shall steal unnoticed from my
lips—

lips—not a sound shall tell the unfeeling world I mourn his death; they know not how to sympathize with grief like mine, and would but mock it with their commonplace professions—in my bosom will I treasure up his image. I will fly mankind, and try to forget their treacheries; in some convent's dark retirement, I will bury myself, there undisturbed to feed my sorrow with the memory of my love, as the oil feeds the wick that consumes it, until memory and life shall be no more.”

Raising her eyes at this moment, they met those of Barbara, who now advancing closer, ventured to address her. The affectionate girl wept from sympathy, as much as from the recollection of Theodore's fate, and her own imprudence in revealing it.—“ My dear lady Victoria,” said she, “ I shall never, never forgive myself for this; I ought to remember that a silent tongue is a good friend; but you know, ‘ what cannot be cured must be endured,’ and they say, ‘ out of evil cometh good;’ but,
sweet

sweet lady, do not take it so to heart—let me try to console you.”

Victoria felt and owned herself grateful, for in this humble domestic's manner there was proof of a kind and feeling heart; but, alas! the consolation she required it was not in poor Barbara's power to bestow.—“ Few things earthly could bring me comfort now, Barbara,” said she, mournfully. “ Sorrows of a lighter nature your honest tears might help to wash away, but mine are deeply fixed—they are silent, selfish, and will be shared by none.”

“ Indeed, my lady, you must not give way; you must strive to bear up against them; the senor is happier, I hope, than either of us, as I said before.”

“ Yes, yes, I will, with all the strength religion can furnish, bear up against it; but I beseech you, mention my love no more.”

Barbara looked the incredulity she felt, at the idea of Victoria's wishing to forget him

him so soon, even almost at the very hour of his death, and her countenance sufficiently spoke what her tongue would fain have uttered.

“ Mistake me not,” said Victoria, guessing her thoughts; “ in this bosom the image of my Theodore shall for ever live; but *here* to speak of him—here, where he fell—where, butcher-like, they slew him, were treason to his memory. Cease to name him—my silent thoughts alone shall be with him.”

“ But silent pent-up grief will surely break your heart. I would rather see you weep for him, and be yourself again; if any thing can ever restore cheerfulness amongst us, it will be that.”

“ Oh, no, no, Barbara! the world has nothing now left to cheer *me*, and what should I have left to cheer the world? it is a wicked one, and I will quit it for ever.”

Starting aghast, as if with some new
horror,

horror, Barbara rivetted her eyes firmly on her lady.—“Quit it!” repeated she. “*Mon Dieu!* what would your ladyship do?”

Victoria immediately comprehended her, and an involuntary shudder shewed that she did so; but widely different was the real meaning of her words from that which Barbara’s imagination had affixed to them; religion and piety were too constant inmates of her bosom, to allow a thought inimical to them to enter there; in sickness or in health, in happiness or in sorrow, still they kept their station round her heart, and, by their vigilance, repelled the approach of every hostile sentiment.

In losing Theodore, she felt that she had lost the chief prop of her earthly affections—those affections, at least, that nature intended she should feel for none but a lover; they no longer had an object to rest upon,

upon, but his visionary image, and those purer ones, detached from every sublunary thought, shone through her bosom as *they* dwindled, with more brightness than before.

A life of seclusion, of all others, she had, until this period, been most unfitted for; the uniform gaiety and vivacity of her temper and disposition, free from every tincture of prejudice, had made her hitherto regard monastic retirement as suitable only to those whom Heaven had not formed capable of enjoyment amongst the busy scenes of men. Of that capability she was now herself divested; the great world had lost its former charms for her—all its joys were turned to bitterness, all its sunshine into clouds and dreary gloom; and from such a world, such an altered world, she had made up her mind to withdraw completely, to bury herself and her sorrows in the eternal solitude
of

of a convent, and when time should have mellowed those sorrows, to take the veil, and devote herself entirely to her God.

-Short was the space of time in which these resolves had been made, but they were firm and unalterable at present. She was aware that her father would never, from any consideration, sanction such a step, retaining, as he did, all the sentiments she herself had once experienced, and decidedly resolute as he would be against parting from a child he so tenderly loved—an only child too! for whose happiness he had all his life been labouring. With as much chance of their obedience, she knew she might command all the elements in nature to stand still, as ask his consent to her entering a monastery, and becoming a nun; and to go without it, to leave clandestinely the paternal roof, would indeed be heart-rending; it was more than she could at first resolve on; yet
to

to go she now *had* resolved ; and reflection told her, that to solicit the count's consent, to hear his steady refusal, and then, in actual, open defiance of that refusal, to fly from her home, from *such* a father, would magnify her conduct, if not into crime, at least into the blackest ingratitude. Her aunt too, she knew, would be immoveably hostile to it, for madame Bertonville loved her with a mother's fondness, and, to the rigour of a conventual life, had ever expressed herself a determined enemy.

No alternative offered. To endeavour to sink the remembrance of De Willenberg into oblivion, by remaining longer on the public stage of life, was revolting to all her feelings; even were self-seclusion a sacrifice, she deemed it such a sacrifice as love demanded, and it was incumbent on her to make.

Knowing, therefore, that to inform them
of

of her intention, would be exactly to have it frustrated, she was obliged to determine, and her heart smote her as she did so, to depart without their knowledge or consent, and in a few hours too from the present time.

Yet to go, and to go, as she supposed, for ever, without even a single adieu to her excellent father or aunt, without their blessing—those dear friends, whom nature and their own deserts had taught her to love and reverence from her earliest infancy; to do this would require no common or feeble exertion—it would be a violence to her feelings, that at the very moment she meditated it, her better reason could not but condemn.

In this irresolute and wavering mood she had continued for some time; but her first determination finally prevailed, and her going was decided on. To do so without
out

out Barbara's knowledge, nay, without her assistance, was impracticable, though aware that it would be perilous to her secret to trust her with it, from her habitual loquacity, and to none else dare she communicate it, or apply for aid.

To effect her escape, she must of necessity not only rouse herself immediately into bodily exertion, but also procure the keys of the castle gates; and this she could only hope to do by means of Barbara, who knew where they were always deposited at night, and she was thus reluctantly obliged to confide her plan to her.

At the distance of a few leagues from the castle, between it and the fatal forest where this horrible catastrophe was reported to have happened, stood the ancient and gloomy convent of St. Agnes. It was a massy and stupendous building, and had withstood, in many places, the ravages of
time,

time, from which the thick foliage in which it was almost enveloped seemed intended to protect it.

The unparalleled restrictions imposed upon its inmates of every rank, and the rigidity with which all its laws were enforced, rendered it universally known, and by many religious votaries, who otherwise would have sought its seclusion, universally dreaded. The abbess was said to be a proud, unfeeling woman, exulting in the dignities of her high office, and fully exerting, if not often abusing, all the power with which she was vested.

She was the daughter of a German baron, equally signalized by his poverty and his pride; and, compelled to it by the former, had, early in life, renounced a world in which she had not the means of gratifying the ambitious projects and wishes of her haughty soul. Dreading the contemptuous indifference of her
VOL. II. C equals,

equals, and the scorn of her superiors, beneath the monastic garb she successfully veiled her longings after the scenes she had quitted for ever, which it had now become impiety in her to cherish. Her outward show of strict devotion to the duties of her present state, raised her high in the estimation of the amiable and unsuspecting woman who then filled the station of domina there; but this latter, however amiable, was not without her failings and defects; her heart was open to courtesy, and her ear to flattery, which the artful Stephania perceiving, she saw at once how to gain her friendship, and, with Machiavelian dexterity and perseverance, set about her task, which she found little difficulty in accomplishing. Her own personal beauty had accustomed her to the ridiculous and insincere jargon of compliments and hyperbole, from a few coxcombs who had fluttered about her while that beauty was in its meridian; and she too well remembered their intoxicating effects
upon

upon herself, not to conclude that offerings so sweet must be equally palatable to another.

With regard to the abbess, she was not quite mistaken. She saw her advantage, and followed it up, until she reached the height she aimed at, in becoming the established favourite of that lady, who employed all her interest to have her nominated for her successor, when she herself should be no more, and which was accordingly done.

In safe and secure possession of her post, she tried to forget the debasing artifices by which she had obtained it; and while her heart retained all its naturally-bad propensities, she wished to appear an unbending model of rigid virtue, piety, and decorum, and punished the slightest deviation from either, in any of the sisterhood, with unexampled severity.

Such was the woman from whom the amiable, the gentle-hearted Victoria was about to seek the consolation of religious counsel; she certainly knew not her character to its full extent, but even *had* she known it, she had nothing to fear for herself from her example. Her breast was strongly fortified against the encroachments of vice, nor had she aught to dread from her severity, for the most malignant passion that ever found a place in the bosom of mortal, one innocent look of Victoria's would have completely disarmed of resentment. Exclusive of this, there was not another monastery within two days journey of the castle, except the one where she had been educated, in the vicinity of Warsaw, and two other eminent and superb ones in that city, whither, were she to venture, it was more than probable she would be immediately recognized by many of the sisters, who being generally of some of the highest families in Poland, had met her frequently at the parties and balls of
the

the courtiers, before they had taken the veil; and through whom it could not be doubted that the place of her concealment would very soon become universally known.

Her mind being made up on these points, she had next to fathom the ability and the willingness of Barbara to forward her plan: with much adroitness she contrived to do so, and to her satisfaction.

Barbara at first represented to her the imprudence of the step she was going to take—the cruelty of thus quitting a father, who almost idolized her, and quitting him too without a clue, without a single pledge, to assure him that she was yet in existence; but her lady's arguments were stronger, and, to her limited comprehension, appeared infinitely more rational.—“Would it not grieve that father, much more than even her absence, to behold her daily repining, daily sink-

c 3

ing

ing to the tomb of her beloved Theodore, from which she almost hoped that this life would not long separate her? would not to see her thus cause such anguish to his bosom, as nothing else could inflict?—assuredly it would.”

This sophistry partly reconciled our heroine to the error she was now on the verge of, and Barbara became convinced.

Relying on her mere word for secrecy, Victoria thought no other injunction necessary, and shrunk from the idea of rendering that promise inviolable, by a bond so solemn, so sacred, as an oath—a bond which the giddy thoughtless girl would not have hesitated a moment to give.

Naturally fond of novelty, whether a new dress, a new face, a new expression, or a new project, every thing new delighted her while it was so; and though she could not divest her mind of the awful impression

impression the late intelligence had left on it, she entered into Victoria's design, with all the bustle, and all the ardour, it would have been commendable in her to evince in a more worthy undertaking; though, in truth, one more worthy of her ingenious talent of plotting and suggesting, could not have presented itself.

Never before had Victoria had cause for a pang of compunction, for never before had she committed an action inconsistent with filial duty and respect, and she now felt that in going thus secretly she was not acting right.

She endeavoured to justify it by determining to write and inform her father of her abode, as soon as she should have entered her noviciate, when it would be no longer in his power, without a formal bull from his holiness the pope, which it would be a tedious and difficult thing to

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obtain,

obtain, to rescue her from the cloistered life she was going to embrace ; nay, when he might, perhaps, not only no longer oppose it, but at length yield his concurrence.

Reconciled by this specious reasoning, nothing now remained but to arrange matters for her speedy departure, which Barbara cautiously, and by extraordinary command of herself, *silently* set about.

The first thing to be done was to pack up, in as small a compass as possible, some clothes, money, and jewels of great value, which her mother's will had bequeathed to her, and afterwards to procure the keys from where the warder placed them every night, as he supposed, in safety.

On the outskirts of the castle wood, resided a distant relative of Barbara's, an elderly peasant, who gained his livelihood by

by making little baskets of various sorts, and carrying them for sale to the neighbouring towns and villages.

This man had frequently shared the fruits of Victoria's bounty, and to him it was now proposed that she should apply for a mode of conveyance to the convent, with which he could very easily, and, she doubted not, would very willingly, accommodate her.

Barbara knew that he was to set out this morning at an early hour, and in the direction of the monastery; and Victoria readily agreed to her suggestion of repairing to his little dwelling without delay, hiring one of his mules, and having enjoined himself to the strictest secrecy, proceeding under his guidance to the place of her destination.

At any other time, or under any other circumstances, our heroine would have

smiled at, probably condemned, a plot altogether so romantic ; but she saw it not now in its proper light ; she felt, it is true, the impropriety there would be in her going alone on foot such a distance and at such an hour ; and she eagerly embraced a proposal so consonant to her wishes and her ideas of decorum, and which almost seemed to diminish the culpability of the proceeding itself.

Barbara was to attend her as far as Jerome's cottage, and afterwards to return, with the same privacy, retire instantly to bed, and, on the ensuing morning, when Victoria was missed, appear totally ignorant of the transaction.

Matters being thus settled, and our heroine's little stock of portables in readiness, Barbara crept softly to the warder's storeroom.

Ere she had got half-way down the
great

great staircase leading to it, her courage almost failed her. Every thing around her was enveloped in the gloom of early twilight; all nature seemed wrapt in deep repose; even they slept to whose hearts she was about to be the agent in striking so direful a blow. The very moon, which until that instant appeared stationary before the Gothic window that faced her, had now veiled itself beneath a long train of clouds, as if unwilling to light her on her imprudent mission.

She paused a while, in a state of indecision; she saw, in its worst colours, the indiscretion into which an affection, perhaps too ardent, too romantic, was hurrying Victoria; but if it were in error, if it even wore the tint of crime, still it was not the offspring of vice—it was the enthusiasm, the distraction of a too sensitive heart, and she pitied, but could not condemn her.

The monotonous ticking of a clock at the stair-head gave an additional dreariness to the place, and she was slowly crawling down, afraid, even at this early hour of silence and darkness, of encountering the warder himself, when the hour of three, suddenly striking, sent such a shrill and frightful din through her ears, that almost at one vast step she bounded to the bottom, and in a few moments found herself in the store-room.

Prying into every nook and corner that could contain a key, she at length, to her great satisfaction and relief, found those she sought, and, glad to get off in safety, returned with them to her lady, who, in a close and warm travelling dress, was anxiously waiting for her.

Barbara carried the parcel and led the way, and with an unsteady step Victoria quitted the chamber that she fancied she never should see again.

At

At the top of the staircase she faltered : it led down from a long gallery, at one extremity of which was her father's apartment, and at the other that of her aunt ; adjoining which was the one where little Henri Bertonville slept in peace and innocence. She could not reflect that she was leaving the abode of all those so dear to her without violent emotions of grief, and leaning on the balustrade that ran along one side of the gallery, she wept bitterly. Until on the point of committing the act, she had not conceived half its magnitude—half its danger, and for none other upon earth but Theodore would she now have overstepped the barrier that discretion was at this moment raising to oppose her. She longed to be gone, yet had scarcely the power to force herself away ; she dreaded perils and accidents from the journey, but she dreaded much more the possibility of being intercepted in her flight—being stopped, even in the castle, by a domestic—still worse,
by

by her father. Yet why fear this? surely they could not know what she was now about merely by instinct; they could not dream of it, and if Barbara's tongue was faithful, all was so far well.

Partly from a hint the latter had thrown out, another fearful probability then arose: pursuit would undoubtedly be made after her in every direction, and notwithstanding the seclusion of the convent whither she was going, she could not help fearing that the circumstance would reach the ears of the lady abbess, who would, though not till urged by compulsory measures, or deeply-interested motives, give her up, and expose her to general censure and ridicule. How was this to be guarded against? There was but one expedient, and that was to assume another name, and invent some story that would render the superior unsuspecting of her real name and rank, and at the same time ensure her admittance into the monastery.

Deception

Deception in every shape was repugnant to her, but this was one she was compelled to, and at all events could only affect herself. She was to give her name as donna Clara de Manzilla, daughter of don Jasper de Manzilla, a Spanish nobleman residing in Warsaw, and who having been about to unite her forcibly to a man she disliked, had thus obliged her to fly from her home, and seek an asylum under the sacred roof of St. Agnes.

The clock, now chiming the half-hour, warned them of the rapid flight of time, and summoning all her resolution, Victoria followed her guide.

With almost noiseless steps, they hurried through the vestibule. Barbara tripped along with the lightness of an aerial figure, while Victoria's every movement was full of fear—the fear of being detected in what her conscience whispered was not
right,

right, and what her father would assuredly disapprove of.

Barbara had quite subdued her usually-rebellious tongue, and having, with all possible caution, drawn aside the massy locks and bolts, and passed through the two spacious courts, they at length found themselves in the wood near Jerome's residence.

Barbara advanced to the cottage, to bespeak what they required; and fortunately the old man was just setting out, having one of the mules laden with his baskets, and another prepared for himself to mount occasionally, as he might feel necessitated by fatigue.

Having, with numerous cautions, and as numerous digressions, imparted their plan to him, as far as concerned himself, she easily won him over as an auxiliary; and

and in a few minutes the mule was fully accoutred for the use of our heroine, who, pale and trembling, just then came up.

In forcing herself thus far from the castle, the worst struggle was over; yet she could not repress a fresh flow of tears, at the moment of parting from her attached servant. It seemed as if she was giving up the last relic that reminded her of home, and throwing herself on Barbara's neck, they both wept abundantly; while honest Jerome, soon comprehending the sorrowful scene, was moved to tears also.

Alarmed lest, by their awakening him to a knowledge of the whole plan, he should be tempted to divulge it, they separated, after the affectionate Barbara had poured a thousand blessings on her beloved lady. The latter, with all the fortitude she could command, took her seat upon the mule, and accompanying Jerome, was soon lost among the trees, while the

the former, still in tears, returned with the same precautions to the castle, now that Victoria was actually gone, regretting seriously the part she had played. She sought her bedroom, but her mind was in too troubled a state to be easily lulled to repose; and in praying for Victoria's safety, and meditating over all the late occurrences, she passed the dreary hours between that and the time at which the domestics were accustomed to rise.

CHAP.

CHAPTER II.

Thinking will make me mad. Why must I think,
When no thought brings me comfort? SOUTHERN.

A DREADFUL presentiment, not exactly of Victoria's flight, but of some new, some tremendous shock that awaited her, flashed on the mind of madame Bertonville at the instant she reached the corridor, and beheld the door of her niece's chamber wide open. She stood for a moment transfixed, and gasping for breath; but the confirmation of her worst fears seeming preferable to the agony she endured from conjectures, the nature of which no reality could exceed, she flew into the room; her eyes rolled about in wild amazement, and quite overcome, she sank almost inanimate on the nearest seat. They were not the
common

common emotions of surprise or fear that had thus subdued her; the violence and the suddenness of the blow had stunned her, and thrown all her faculties into a state almost of stupefaction, from which it required the most powerful remedies to arouse her.

The noise and bustle above summoned the count, for none had courage enough to tell such a father that his daughter, his darling daughter, was missing. As he rushed rapidly up the staircase, he heard his sister's moans; he thought but of her; and on entering the room, the crowd of alarmed domestics that surrounded her, prevented him, at the first moment, from noticing that Victoria was not there.—“In the name of Heaven, what means all this, Matilda, and where—where is my child?” he at length frantically demanded, while he caught his sister's hand, and his whole form shook with horrible apprehensions.

“The countess has been suddenly seized,
my

my lord," replied one of the attendants, perceiving madame Bertonville unable to speak.

"And where is my daughter?" reiterated the count, turning his frenzied eye on the terrified domestic; "instantly speak!" he added, in a voice like thunder.

Poor Annette was so completely overpowered that she could *not* speak, and again he put the same interrogatory to his sister, in so vehement a tone, that it appeared to recall her fleeting senses—"Where is my child?"

"We know not," was the countess's nearly-inaudible reply.

"Know not!" he echoed, starting for an instant upon his feet with the velocity of lightning, whose fire seemed to flash from his eyes. Not another sound escaped his quivering lips, but convulsively clasping his hands, he fell prostrate and motionless on the floor.

To restore the afflicted father to animation,

tion, was all that could now be done, and even that seemed cruelty; for insensibility was an enviable state, compared to that of being able to comprehend the full extent of this dire calamity. The shock however appeared, after a while, to have given a maddening energy to all his faculties. He thought, spoke, and acted at the same moment, and with the same ungovernable rapidity; and his thoughts, speech, and actions, had apparently thrown off all control of reason. Equally unreasonable and absurd would it have been to attempt to sooth him into composure by argument; and convinced of this, they left Nature to herself, knowing that she and Reason would in time resume their proper functions.

In the interim, madame Bertonville was carried to bed, alarmingly ill. The unfortunate occurrences of the last few days had been gradually preying on her naturally-delicate health, and had now taken so fast hold upon it, that she quickly sank
into

into a low nervous fever, from whose debilitating effects serious apprehensions were entertained of a fatal result, and an eminent physician was sent for immediately to attend her.

Ever since the report of the awful murder of his master—a master he had almost adored, the inconsolable Conrad had kept himself closely immured, where he could, uninterrupted and unwitnessed, give full vent to the grief of his bursting heart. This was the first cause of real sorrow he had ever known. It was not De Willenberg's liberality that had endeared him to him; for, alas! until very lately, his pecuniary means had been too limited to allow him to deal out money unsparingly; but it was the magnanimity, the nobleness, the kindness, and the genuine goodness of his nature, which shone in every action of his life, and which had more effectually won his affection than the bestowal of the most brilliant gifts could have done. What an agonizing

agonizing task then had he now before him, to seek that master's corpse—to find it probably lacerated, mangled by the ruthless hands of savage banditti—the stream that had lately given life, health, and beauty to it, now pouring in red torrents over the unhallowed ground that those abandoned wretches trod! His blood almost froze in his veins—his very soul grew sick with horror at the picture his fancy drew; but however appalling was such a task, it was a duty that he deemed himself bound to perform, and which, with count Herman's sanction, he resolved on.

The count, in fact, intended to have an immediate and diligent search made for the body, by a band of his vassals, and the peasantry on his estate; after which, it was his determination to have a petition presented to the king, praying that the forest might be entirely hewn down, and the whole race of its diabolical inhabitants exterminated.

Conrad

been united in a few days, when the events we have related interrupted the general harmony.

Not finding her in the work-room, he sat down to await her coming, and entered into a long soliloquy on the past and the present circumstances. — “Never, never shall I be myself again,” said he, with a sigh, that seemed to breathe forth the last ray of departing hope. “The whole house is turned upside down. It was not enough for my dear young master to be cruelly, barbarously murdered; but there is the lady Victoria gone off, nobody knows where; and who can tell what she may have done with herself? Heaven preserve her from harm!—I have no heart to do any thing, and how shall I ever have the heart to go in search of my master’s lifeless body? Little I thought, when he came here, the finest cavalier in all Poland, that I should now have to fetch him home a corpse! and to go too without knowing whether
lady

lady Victoria is dead or alive!—worse and worse!”

With a countenance full of woe, and plainly evincing that some dire disaster had befallen her, Barbara now came in. Her ear had caught his last words, and in a voice of mingled terror and vexation, she echoed them.—“Ay,” said she, “you may well say, ‘worse and worse;’ there have I been worried about this whole blessed morning by my lord, with old Reuben, hunting all the horseponds and the fishponds, and St. Agnes knows where, for lady Victoria, as if she was fool enough to drown herself, forsooth!—a likely thing indeed! But I knew better—‘life is sweet,’ as the proverb says. The worst of the story is, I saw the count himself through the trees, coming towards us, and so I then pretended to be very busy looking for my young lady in the great pond; but, as ill luck would have it, I stretched out my neck too far, and plump I tumbled into the water.”

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“ I fancy

“ I fancy that cooled your courage a little,” observed Conrad, checking a faint smile, as if it mocked his grief.

At this unlucky speech Barbara haughtily drew up her head, screwed her mouth into the strongest expression of contempt she could put on, and scornfully throwing her eyes sideways at him—“ I am sure, Mr. Conrad,” said she, “ *you* are cool enough about my misfortunes. I did not think *you* would speak so ; but I see it is not all gold that glitters—you are a very hard-hearted young man, so you are. Hot as love is, soon it is cooled, that is plain enough.”

“ No, Barbara,” he mournfully replied, “ I hope I am *not* hard-hearted. I can and do feel as I ought for the loss of my excellent master ; and as to lady Victoria, I would almost rather know at once she was dead than be in such uncertainty about her.”

“ Humph !” cried Barbara, with a significant toss of her head, and in a voice that
declared

declared she was far from being in a good-humour, though in a talkative one, "I am sure she is very much obliged to you—I dare say that is more than she wishes herself. But blind men cannot judge of colours."

"Do you then know where she is?" he demanded, hope for a moment crimsoning his features; "if you *do*, for the love of God, say so, and let me hasten to inform the count——"

"Nay, not so fast," she interrupted; "keep your breath to cool your porridge. How should I know? I would not tell you whether she is dead or alive for the whole world; she would never forgive me if I did; so 'ask me no questions, and I will tell you no lies,' as the saying is."

Barbara's volubility made her completely forgetful of herself, and the torrent of inconsistencies she was uttering; but it was now quite evident to Conrad that she had been accessory to Victoria's flight, and knew her retreat, which he hoped, by a

little clever manœuvring, to discover.—
“I do not know how it is, Barbara,” said he,
“but I do think, somehow or another, that
her father need not be so distracted about
her; I warrant she will take care of herself
wherever she is. What do *you* think?”

“*Parbleu!* I did not say that she was
alive—I only said I would not tell you
where she is gone, nor I will not neither.
—No, no; I am not one of your babblers;
‘you cannot catch an old bird with chaff.’”

“I have caught *you*, at all events,”
thought Conrad, “and I will keep you
fast till I find all out. But from what you
said, I think she *is* alive and safe, thank
Heaven!”

“But I know better; she is dead by
this time,” cried his determined oppo-
nent, vehemently. “I think going to a
convent is enough to kill any body.”

A little more, and all would be revealed.
Conrad had gained the advantage, and he
pursued it.—“Now, Barbara,” said he, “I
fancy you are only bragging a little, and
that

that you know nothing at all about her; for I would lay my life there is not a convent in this part of the country."

"Bragging indeed!" exclaimed the angry waiting-maid, flinging herself on a chair, not very gently; "I am not one of your braggers, Mr. Conrad. I would have you to know, sir, there is the convent of St. Agnes within three leagues of this. But do not think to pump the secret out of me; I will let you see I am no bragger, nor tattler either."

He had, however, pumped so much of the truth out of her, and the colour alternately rose to his cheeks and disappeared, as his thoughts at one moment rested on his murdered master, and the next on Victoria, convinced that she was at least in safety; but he had yet more to learn, and therefore strove to veil his curiosity under an appearance of incredulity—"Nay," continued he, "I can hardly believe this; you must be mistaken, at least about the convent of St. Agnes you talk of; I never
D 4 heard

heard of it; besides, I am certain she would not venture into one; why, her very name would betray her. You must be wrong, in spite of all you can say to the contrary."

Rage, at having her word thus apparently doubted, now hurried her quite beyond herself; and totally unable to control her tongue—"I tell you, sir," cried she, "she *is* gone to the convent of St. Agnes; and what is more, I *saw* her go; and as to a name, Mr. Conrad, there are more names than one in the world; I believe donna Clara de Manzilla is a *name*, as well as lady Victoria Herman."

The whole secret was now told, and Barbara at first seemingly unconscious that she had betrayed it; but quickly recollecting her indiscretion, she owned it; and bursting into tears, entreated, that even to appease or sooth the count's alarms, he would not divulge her young lady's place of retreat. To this Conrad gave a
reluctant

reluctant consent; he had intended to carry the intelligence to his lordship immediately, but now changed his mind to a plan he deemed more prudent.

On his way to the forest, he meant to call at the convent of St. Agnes, and make such inquiries as would ascertain if lady Victoria were really there; and having perfectly satisfied himself that she was, to impart the joyful tidings to her father, as soon as he should return to the castle.

Having yielded her a sort of conditional promise of secrecy, he now joined the band of armed vassals that were assembled in the court, and set out with them on their perilous journey to the forest, while several others proceeded, in different routes, in search of the lady Victoria.

Not a shadow of suspicion had entered the count's mind of her having gone to a monastery; he thought it likely, if she

were still living, that she had procured some conveyance to Warsaw, or, more probably, to Zersk, where the letter announced that Theodore had gone, in the vain expectation that she should find him yet in safety, for he was not aware that the report of his fall by a murderer's hand had reached her also.

Hope, that solace to our woes—that balm to our griefs—that ministering angel that descends upon our hearts in the midst of their bitterest sorrows, like a brilliant gleam of sunshine breaking through the murkiest clouds of winter, did not totally desert the count; sad and gloomy even as was the horizon of the present prospect, a cheerful ray at intervals broke in upon it, which, however, often rendered the darkness that succeeded it more profound.

Returning to the saloon, after seeing them depart, he met Henri Bertonville in the vestibule, sobbing most piteously, and

and hastening in the direction of his mother's apartment, as fast as his tears, which streamed abundantly down his cheeks, would permit him to discern the way. He had but just returned from his customary morning excursion on his pony, and the countess's indisposition, with the cause of it, having been inadvertently imparted to him by the ever-talking Barbara, the affectionate boy was flying to her, when, meeting the count, he suddenly stopped:—"Oh, tell me, tell me, my dear uncle," said he, "what ails my beloved mamma?—and who has taken away cousin Victoria?—and where is our dear——"

Theodore, he would have added; but quickening sobs prevented his uttering it; and he hid his face against one of the pillars that supported the roof.—"Do not grieve so, my sweet child," said the count, as he took him in his arms, and tried to do for him what he could not do for himself—to console him. "Your amiable mother will be better presently, I trust,

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my love; and your cousin—oh, my child, my child——”

He was about to say they might never see her again, but he could not finish the sentence; and agitated almost to suffocation, by endeavouring to overcome his tears, he darted, with Henri, into the saloon, and threw himself on the sofa, in all his former wildness and anguish.—“ Does some horrific dream delude my senses?” cried he, pressing his hand upon his forehead, whose violent throbbing gave a feverish hue to his whole face. “ Can such calamities—such unparalleled afflictions, be really the lot of one poor individual?—does some charm or potent spell bind up my faculties, that I perceive not the reality? Yet, no; surely I feel that my senses are awake—all *is* as I see. Oh, Theodore, thou darling of my hopes, the ornament of all societies that courted thee, swept thus from a world thy very name adorned—by an assassin’s hand too! My daughter gone! she on whose glowing
loveliness

loveliness my very soul gazed with rapture, gone from me, I know not how or whither! It is—it is too much;” and covering his eyes with his handkerchief, he continued to weep with the yet-sobbing Henri.

Doctor Wernheim, who had been sent for to see madame Bertonville, now came in, saying that there was no longer any actual danger to be apprehended from her ladyship's disorder, as some efficient remedies had been resorted to; but she was in that low state that required she should be kept perfectly quiet, and nothing whatever permitted to disturb her; even the count's presence in her apartment was strictly prohibited; and Henri being, of course, included in the general interdict, was reluctantly obliged to content himself, for the present, with the doctor's favourable account: he then repaired to impart the news of his mother's amendment to
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the favourite attendant, who took care of his pony, and left the count and Wernheim conversing together on domestic subjects.

The noise of a carriage driving through the lawn attracted their attention, and presently afterwards a servant entered, announcing the arrival of the duke of Silesia, who was just alighting from his carriage.

At such a time as this, the count would gladly have dispensed with the honour; but it being contrary to court etiquette to decline a visit from any member of the royal family, he was unwillingly obliged to go through the irksome ceremonial of receiving him, and accordingly desired that the major-domo would usher his royal highness up.

Doctor Wernheim now politely took
his

his leave, promising to call again on the following day; and the count, as well as circumstances would permit, prepared to receive his illustrious visitor..

CHAP.

CHAPTER III.
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Yet must I think less wildly; I have thought  
Too long and darkly, till my brain became,  
In its own eddy, boiling and o'erwrought,  
A whirling gulf of fantasy and flame.

*Childe Harold, Canto III.*

THE olive-branch of peace still decorated the Polish brows, wreathed around them by the fluctuating hand of war, which had wrested from their enemies the proud standard of their liberties, and for a while hailed them again the victors.

A long succession of hostilities and broils with the surrounding states being at length suspended, unhappily not yet terminated, by the wise policy and the judicious arrangements of Augustus, he had  
the

the gratification of beholding his people now in comparative happiness and contentment. He was happy too himself, for he knew all his subjects to be faithfully and ardently attached both to his own person, and to the great cause of liberty in which he had been so long engaged; the name of Augustus, their beloved sovereign, was repeated, everywhere throughout his dominions, with all the respect and admiration it deserved; and every Pole, those farthest removed from, as well as those nearest to the royal presence, strove by some means to testify his loyalty and affection to so excellent a monarch.

At leisure now, in the bosoms of their families, to contemplate objects hitherto of minor importance, it became a matter of thought, nay, of interest, to the whole nation, that the king should marry, to perpetuate his illustrious name, and they trusted also, his actions; and that in doing so, he should  
choose

choose a lady worthy of him in virtues, in accomplishments, and in rank.

Several princesses were named to him, as matches in every respect eligible; but most of those he absolutely and openly, and *all* of them he *secretly* protested against. He had seen the woman, the only woman with whom he thought he could be happy; but she was not of royal, though of noble birth; and this circumstance threw a gloom for a while over the delightful prospect of sharing the honours of his exalted station with a wife. After some reflection, however, he had mentioned to one of his confidential ministers the name of the lady who had captivated him, and against whom, as his future queen, he hoped the ardency of his love for her would do away every objection that might be made.

The premier not only approved of his  
majesty's

majesty's choice, but advised him, should it also meet the approbation of the other ministers, that a deputation should wait upon count Herman, formally demanding the hand of his daughter in marriage.

It was however his majesty's wish, that before the honour he intended to the lady Victoria should be thus publicly announced, the count should be privately apprised of it; for which purpose, the duke of Silesia being, next to the sovereign, the highest individual at present in the kingdom, seemed the fittest personage to be employed on an occasion so momentous.

Accordingly the matter had been confined entirely to the cabinet—not a word had transpired beyond it; and the king, having had an interview with his brother on the same subject before, now summoned him, to give him final instructions as to his mission. To those instructions Leopold promised implicit fidelity, and spoke sanguinely

guinely of his majesty's success, while his heart was secretly a traitor to the cause. He succeeded however in deceiving the king, by an assurance of his zeal; and leaving him in full reliance on his pretended sincerity, he set out for the castle, not to sue in behalf of his brother, but of himself.

Even the proud, the adamant heart of Leopold had at length been softened into all the tenderness of love; but it was by no means softened altogether—there were other parts of that heart still influenced by other passions; the same being who could feel the most glowing affection for one object, could also cherish in his bosom the most rancorous enmity towards another, and that other was De Willenberg.

With all his faults, his failings, and his vices, Leopold was not actually naturally depraved, nor hardened against some of  
the

the finer touches that virtue makes upon the human heart. Initiated into the policies, intrigues, and dangerous habits of a court, he was early in life trained to imbibe its infatuating prejudices, and through those prejudices to view mankind. If a few virtues *did* lurk in his disposition, they lay there dormant and unemployed; they were of that passive description that nothing ever called into action; happy had it been for him if his other qualities had been equally passive. He was one of those who do not often deliberately and from principle rush upon crime; but if temptation presented itself, he resisted it not. Instead of rousing all his energies to repel its advances, he calmly awaited its approach, and as calmly suffered it to lead him where it would

Still however he had lived in a state of comparative purity of thought and action, until he beheld Victoria, the one destined, though innocently, to plunge  
him

him into guilt of the deepest dye. Almost at the first moment of seeing, he loved her; such a woman as a wife, he thought would be all the world to him; and an idea very soon fixed itself on his mind, that he could, after some difficulty, obtain her. But difficulties indeed there were; the king's passion for her was the chief one; yet this and all others he resolved to encounter, for Victoria was, in his opinion, worth every risk. Her love for De Willenberg, and the count's declared intention of uniting them, seemed at first a barrier to his hopes, as formidable as the sovereign's intimation of his design—a barrier too at which he had, at the moment of perceiving it, started in such confusion as had nearly betrayed him. He retreated for a while, to reflect how he could most effectually set it aside; and having quickly hit upon the means, he now came fully prepared to combat any other obstacle he might meet.

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His countenance wore a well-feigned expression of sadness as he entered the saloon, from which the count inferred that he either guessed, or had been already informed, of what had happened; too well indeed Leopold knew that De Willenberg was not there, but Victoria's flight was a thing he had yet to hear of.—“I pray your highness to be seated,” said his lordship, hospitality trying to smile through his half-repressed tears, while he exerted himself to go through the respectful forms that Leopold's rank demanded. “Oh, duke! heavy and direful are the calamities it pleased Heaven to pour upon me since last we met, but it *was* Heaven sent them, and I must submit. I have been too happy hitherto, but mortal must not be so; he must be reminded of his dependence on a higher Power—the Divine Will! Alas! I am ill prepared to receive your highness as I ought——”

“Nay, nay, my lord,” interrupted the duke,

duke, "a truce with etiquette! Believe me, I hold your grief too sacred to be mocked by any outward display of pomp and ceremony, from which your heart must revolt. I have heard of the untimely fate of my amiable young friend, and am come to condole with you on the death of one who was so dear to you, not to have my cheeks covered with burning blushes by gorgeous formalities, that suit not the time nor the occasion."

"*His* fate!" reiterated the count—"Duke, it is not only *his* fate I have to deplore, but the fate of one even dearer to me—my daughter!—ay, my very daughter has left me! cruelly—cruelly fled me! Oh! it will break my heart! this is fate's decisive blow—I feel that I cannot survive *her* death, if——"

"Gracious Providence! what says your lordship?" demanded the duke, involuntarily grasping the count's arm, and all the agony of sudden, dreadful disappointment to his hopes distorting his features; "the lady

lady Victoria fled! said you—can it be possible?”

“ I expected not my deathblow from *her*,” stammered the count, through the tears that still flowed, in spite of his exertions—“ from my child—I deserved it not, but she *has* given it—she *is* gone, I fear for ever; all search for her has hitherto been in vain.”

As he said this, his hand warmly pressed the duke's, for he misconstrued his emotion into sympathy and pity.

“ This is indeed the very climax of earthly suffering!” exclaimed Leopold, in a voice as agitated as the count's; “ but, my lord, have you *no* idea where she may possibly be?”

“ Oh, duke! I have but conjectures, shadows—horrible shadows to rest on; all within me is anarchy and madness; ever since her flight, ten thousand thoughts, wild and improbable, have flitted through

my distracted brain. I fancied her seeking in her despair her lover's mangled corpse; sometimes I have thought her dead—heavens! what a thought! self-immolated!—then again I have thought her (live I to say it?)—thought my child deranged! all this I have fancied. I have had such strange—such terrible ideas, that I dare think no longer; but 'tis best we quit this subject for a while—it too greatly moves your highness; pray you, duke, let it not affect you thus deeply—how fares it with the king, your royal brother?”

“Indifferently indeed, my lord,” sighed Leopold; “the death of young De Wilenberg, even one whom he knew not, has sensibly affected him; but I trust the bustle of state affairs by which he is surrounded, and which alone prevented him from visiting you on the melancholy occasion, will rouse him from his grief. Alas! I know not how to bring him this additional intelligence of your daughter.”

“We must—we must quit this theme,  
duke;

duke; it is distressing to you," again urged the count.

"It is a sad and sorrowful one, my lord, but too well does it now accord with me; any other subject would be irksome, and on any other *you* could not converse calmly; a military life, nor scenes of warfare and bloodshed, have not so changed my nature, that I could hear such things as these with callous unsympathizing indifference."

The count was indeed inadequate to any other topic, and Leopold's pathetic tones were grateful to his ear and to his heart.—"Duke," said he, "you can read my very inward feelings, yet I could not have hoped for such condescending kindness from one of your highness's rank."

"Talk not of rank, count—it is a mere sound—Nature herself disowns such a thing; you have my friendship—I would, in return, have yours."

"Yours, duke, it has long been; by me the friendship of my sovereign's bro-

ther must be prized ; and could any thing short of my child's restoration make me happy, it would be that."

The wily Leopold saw that he was now gaining ground, and he boldly advanced, but with all his usual wariness.—“ Even a sovereign's brother,” he replied, “ is proud to stand thus high in the esteem of count Herman—yes, my lord, may I ever prove worthy of your esteem—nay, more—I would not only be your friend—I would, if possible, bear a higher title—a title far dearer to me.”

“ That is *not* possible,” said the count, not divining what was to come ; “ you are at the very summit of my esteem now, and nothing can raise you higher.”

“ One thing *could*, my lord ; it were greater to bear the title of your *son*.”

“ My son !” repeated the astonished count, incredulity at first superseding every other expression in his countenance —“ Silesia's royal duke my son ! but it is your highness's pleasure to jest with my sorrows ;

sorrows; would that the time were more appropriate to your bantering!" he added, with some asperity.

"Count Herman, you mistake me," said the duke, seriously; "if I could wantonly sport with these your noblest feelings—feelings that the proudest monarch might make his boast, I were a wretch, sunk far beneath the dignity of man—much less of him you call Silesia's duke. Hear me repeat it—I *would* be your son—ay, marry your daughter, the lady Victoria."

A look that spoke all he felt was the only way in which the agitated count could at first reply; gasping with emotion, he fixed his deep-searching eyes intently on him, and snatching his hand—"Duke," cried he, "what—what does all this imply? know you aught of my child?—say instantly where she is, and if she *does* live—drive me not mad by this hesitation."

"Would to Heaven I *did* know, and

*could* inform you now ; but I will seek her, and——”

“ No more—no more of this,” sobbed the heart-rived father, almost dashing Leopold’s hand from him, “ you but remind me that I have no daughter—it is unfeeling, cruel—it is too true, I have not a daughter now, but I must be resigned ;” and with a handkerchief he swept away his tears.

“ For worlds, my lord, I would not basely aggravate your sufferings ; but I beseech you, despair not thus ; it is possible—nay, it is probable, that lady Victoria lives, and is in safety ; if this world still contains her, I will find her, though all the elements of nature should exert their united fury to oppose me.”

“ May Heaven reward and bless you !” was all the count could for a while articulate. Hope once more shone brightly over his features as he continued—“ You know not the feelings of joy you have re-  
vived

vived within me ; were I *sure* of her being in safety, it were happiness—bliss !”

“ And to see her, my lord ?”

“ Oh, felicity unutterable !” exclaimed the count, his words and his whole face animated as if he clasped her at that moment to his bosom.

“ If I range the whole circuit of the universe, I will bring her back to your paternal embrace. Then, count, will *you* reward me ?” asked Leopold, with an insinuating softness that he imagined irresistible.

“ What recompence dare I offer your highness, for a service above all price in human power to give ?”

“ Promise me your daughter’s hand ? *that* is the highest reward mortal can give me, and it is the one I claim ; say that she shall be my wife—ay, Silesia’s royal duchess, and within this very hour I will depart in search of her.

The count hesitated—the hope of having his daughter restored to him, the

dread of making a rash promise, and reluctance to say any thing that the duke could take umbrage at, were powerfully contending with each other; but rectitude was ever his guide, and he replied with firmness—"If Nature had sown the seeds of ambition within this bosom, duke, surely they would now vegetate in all the exuberance that ever baneful passion did through the heart of man. I confess the thought of being allied to royalty *might* overcome stronger principles than mine; but if my Victoria lives, think what she would say, had I rashly promised to wed her to another, and before the first, perhaps the *only* one who can possess her affections (her beloved Theodore), was laid in his cold grave."

"Pardon me, count, for saying that I think such an argument borders on sophistry; surely the lady Victoria will not romantically continue to love an ideal object—nay, if she did, it were your part to combat—to subdue such a weakness in  
her.

her. The man who loves his children as a father *ought* will study first their welfare—that once decided, let him then humour their caprices if he thinks proper.”

“My daughter’s welfare, duke, is a thing I never *have* been—never *could* be indifferent to; nor should a virtuous passion like hers be termed romantic. Theodore de Willenberg was worthy of her love; he was my choice as well as hers, and as long as his memory exists, we must revere it.”

“Heaven forbid,” said this wily serpent, “that *I* should be the one to prejudice either of you against De Willenberg; he was your choice, I knew; he was a fascinating, and in several respects an amiable young man; and one of the most convincing proofs of his merit is his having been also the choice of another.”

This was a master-stroke; he saw the count instantly turn pale at the supposition that Theodore might have deceived

E 5

him—

him—have loved another besides his daughter.

We are often prone to doubt even the object most dear to us; selfish in our attachments, we expect the undivided love of those to whom we *are* attached, and the merest trifles will often excite our most torturing jealousies and fears.

Such was the case with count Herman, whose mind was unfortunately too much inclined to receive impressions of that nature.—“I *have* sometimes fancied——” He faltered, and a fearful pause ensued.—“*Who* is that other?” he vehemently demanded, and an unusual fierceness shot from his dark eyes. “Knew your highness aught of De Willenberg’s heart that *I* did not know? did he confide to *you* the secret that he dared to hide from *me*—his passion for another?”

“Nay, nay, my lord, I meant not to alarm you thus,” he answered, in an assumed

sumed voice of gentleness; "my unguarded tongue often nearly betrays me into things I would shrink from uttering."

He knew this artful reply was exactly calculated to excite further suspicion of Theodore's fidelity, and to elicit further interrogation; and wrapt securely in his accustomed plausibility, he awaited it.

"Duke, your words to me are dark and mysterious; I entreat your highness to explain them; while they are thus ambiguous, they throw a shade over the character of De Willenberg, which I fain would have removed—say then, at once, were his affections devoted to another, while he presumed, insultingly dared, to profess an attachment to *my* daughter?"

"Truly, my lord, you impose an awkward task on me; it were better that this affair should rest in silence—therefore do not urge me further; more than I have said might be displeasing to you;" but it was far from Leopold's intention to stop here.

E 6

"Think

“Think you, my royal friend, that I am made of such irascible and fiery stuff, that the breath even of an ungentle word would blow me into flame? Fear not to tell me all, for I anticipate it.”

With seeming reluctance to obey, the duke now ingeniously stammered out a few execrations on his indiscretion; but he soon found an excuse for carrying that *indiscretion* still further, and, with all the grave solemnity he could collect into his variable features, he proceeded—“I knew your lordship’s partiality to De Willenberg, and I feared you would pronounce me officious or unfriendly, had I ventured to interfere on the subject of his marriage with your daughter, or told of things unpleasant and unasked for. Yet think not that I should have passively witnessed his intended perfidy—think not that I would have let you sacrifice your child—that I would silently have allowed De Willenberg to play the villain, by giving his hand to *her*, while his heart,  
the

the dearest part of our mortal frame, was the property of another. No, my lord, in pity to him—aware of the disgrace that such a discovery must have heaped upon him, and still more, withheld by the hope that he would magnanimously retract, while yet in his power, I exposed him not while living; nor should I have done so, until his proceeding to an actual union with lady Victoria would have rendered my disclosing it a matter of obligation and of honour. I do not mean to assert that to such an extremity he *would* have carried his guilt; but, my lord, rank and wealth have potent charms in the eyes of poor frail Humanity; and De Willenberg, with all his fascinations, was like the rest of us—a mere erring mortal. He *might*, in an unguarded hour, have done what he would afterwards at leisure repent—what would have covered him with ignominy, shame, and endless remorse—made the woman he loved a suicide, your daughter

ter for ever miserable, and himself a villain !”

“ Thank Heaven—thank Heaven !” ejaculated the count, fervently, “ *he* has escaped the guilt, and *we* the bitter anguish that would have ensued. Oh, did ever I think this, that I should have cause to rejoice at the death of him I loved ! But who, who,” he cried, clasping his hands in anguish almost as acute, “ who could have suspected all this, beneath the mask of innocence and integrity he wore ?—none. Oh, inscrutable Providence ! that willed his death in time to save him from such a gulf of hideous crime as a few days more had plunged him into—to preserve my child from lasting wretchedness. Ungrateful, cruel Theodore ! to use such arts, such soft seducing blandishments, to win our love, and having won it, thus to fling it from you ! No, we deserved not that, serpent-like, you should thus have pointed a sting, to wound the bosoms of the very ones who fostered you.”

The

The poison had now taken root, and, as even the rankest weeds require an occasional gleam of sunshine to mature their venom, so this skilful hypocrite knew that the one he had just planted in the count's bosom required a kindlier ray now than had hitherto beamed through his mischievous plot, to bring it to perfection.—“I pray you, my lord,” said he, “treat it more lightly—let it not subdue your manly fortitude; we have *all* our faults and crimes, and poor De Willenberg has by his death surely more than atoned for *his*. Peace to the memory of my unfortunate young friend!”

“Peace indeed to his memory, though guilty!” reiterated the count. “No, duke, I cannot help being saddened, mortified, by such a discovery, even now; were he living, I would not tamely bear it—it was an insult to *my* dignity, and my daughter's; her sex at least should have screened her from it, if her rank and her virtues could

could not; but he has paid a dreadful forfeit—be that, as you say, his atonement; we will think of him no longer.”

“But with due indulgence for human frailty,” added Leopold, judiciously; “with pity for his failings and his fate, and, assuredly, count, with admiration of the many brilliant, many endearing qualities, that, with *all* his failings, he did really possess.”

“He did—he did certainly possess them,” cried the count, still willing to talk of one he had so highly estimated. “Oh, prince! it is agonizing to know those we love unworthy. I regarded Theodore with all a father’s affection; ere reason had yet dawned over his infant mind, I nursed him; as he and my sweet Victoria sat face to face crowing in my arms, how often have they twined in fond innocence their little hands, seeming to say, in their mute eloquence, that hearts which love had joined in infancy should not in age be sundered!

But

But the delusions of youth are over with them now, and I too must forget them, as had they never been."

"How often, my lord, do we see the fair pictures youthful attachments present, faded, in the midst of all their brightness, by some withering blast! how often too by absence, that direst bane to love!"

"Would that it had proved a bane to my Victoria's—that it had withered *hers*, while it was yet in the bud! would to God that she had never loved, never seen the too-attractive Theodore! then, then had I not now been childless."

"Nor are you so, my friend; have I not said I would restore her to you? my very life would I risk to do so. But, my lord, we have wandered from the point where all *my* affections are centered—the subject dearest to my thoughts; on it alone they delight to dwell: dare I hope that Victoria will be mine—that your lordship will sanction my suit? Oh! by one word *bid*  
me

me to hope this, and I shall be the happiest of mortals.”

“ In truth, duke, I hardly know how I ought to answer—a proposal of this nature from your highness might dazzle ambition itself; yet it is not the gorgeous pomp of royalty—it is not your rank as a prince that influences me; but I will venture to reply. Your highness has volunteered to seek her—I pray Heaven you may succeed! if Heaven *does* grant my prayer, and you do indeed find her, be it yours to achieve the conquest of her heart, obtain *her* consent to become your wife, duke, and you have mine.”

Leopold had now reached the first vast step towards the attainment of his object; he saw that his footing on it was firm, and having got thus far in safety, he could view the terrible height to which he had yet to climb with less fear of failing, and less and less apprehension of personal danger. Judging it impolitic to delay, he therefore

therefore boldly advanced; the real joy and delight that this assurance of the count's inspired him with, gave even to his ardent expressions an air of sincerity that completely baffled the other's discernment; he poured out a profusion of thanks, and all the encomiums upon Victoria that could gratify a fond father's pride. He had wound himself completely into the count's good opinion, and he undauntedly proceeded—"One thing more, my lord, I have to solicit—it is my last, my most earnest request—let not any part of this conversation transpire; delicacy alone requires that it should be kept a secret, but, of all others, I would not that the king should know it."

This was indeed his most *earnest* request, and there was something in the latter part of the injunction that startled the count.—“And why such particular secrecy towards the king?” demanded his lordship; “think you that his majesty would —But I had forgotten, duke—I have  
been

been rash, precipitate, culpable in this affair—I pray your highness's permission to retract the imprudent, the dangerous promise, our enthusiasm hurried me into. Consider, duke, your elevated station in society, your close affinity to the illustrious sovereign of Poland, and dismiss the romantic idea of making my daughter your wife; oh, palpable absurdity! think no more of it—it must not be.”

“ My lord, my lord, do you *now* bid me think no more of her? As reasonably might I bid *you* forget her for ever, and as readily would you obey me. Have I not your word, count Herman, to sanction my union with her, if she herself consents? and is not your word a bond inviolable? By Heaven! I never will give up the thought until her own lips put a negative upon my sanguine hopes; but to the fact which has thus misled you, and which, when explained, will instantly end your objections—far from deeming your daughter unworthy of royal rank, the king covets  
vets

vets her for himself—what say you now?”

“Impossible!” was the interjection the count had nearly uttered, but he recollected himself in time to prevent such a violation of etiquette to the royal personage who addressed him. Astonishment at the idea of Poland’s monarch asking his daughter in marriage to raise her to the dignity of a queen, kept him for a while in silence, but he could not doubt it; yet amid all his amazement, paternal vanity, highly flattered, was most conspicuous—“I know not how we have deserved such condescension from his majesty, or your highness,” said he, bowing gracefully as he spoke; “in a father’s partial eyes, Victoria was every thing lovely that mortal can be; but surely—surely——” He suddenly stopped here, for the pride of his heart, in having such a daughter, would not permit him to acknowledge her unworthy even of his sovereign’s hand.

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The duke finished the sentence, and banished that part of the flattering delusion at once—"She is worthy of *me*, my lord; she shall be duchess of Silesia, but she can never be a queen, unless fate should snatch my brother from the throne, and place *me* there—there is more in my words than perhaps I dare explain to you;" but it was so evident to the count that he *wished* to explain them, that even had not his own wishes urged him to demand it, he would have done so.

"What is there in them, duke, that I may not hear?" asked he, in a voice tremulous with alarm; "has his majesty said any thing, the repetition of which he prohibited?"

"Not exactly," muttered Leopold, in a sort of evasive tone, that betrayed a willingness and an unwillingness to go on—"Oh! it is nothing, nothing! your lordship's not knowing it were as though it had never been."

This

This artifice succeeded as he wished, and the count still more eagerly pressed him.

“ Well, then, lest your doubts *might* be again excited by my request, it seems better that I *should* deal explicitly with you ; but it will be conditionally, my lord—you must swear never to reveal to any body either our past or our present conversation ; the subject on which you ask an explanation is of that delicate nature, that no common ear must ever hear it ; will you do what I require—will you promise me too, that if I should reveal any thing offensive to your ear, you will listen with calmness ? ”

These were stipulations that could not be acceded to in a moment ; but the count fancied that what Leopold had to say was something he *ought* to know—“ If your highness considers my word my bond, accept it now as such,” said he ; “ I would not willingly take an oath—rely upon my simple promise of secrecy—it shall be in-

violate ;

violate; and be your disclosure what it may, I *will* hear with calmness."

"I have said the king, my brother, wished to possess your daughter——"

"Yes — wishing she was of suitable birth," suggested the count—"but I interrupt you."

"What think you were the conditions, count, on which this *honour* was to be conferred?"

"Nothing, I hope, to sully *my* honour," said his lordship, with an air of severe and haughty majesty.

"Let your own opinion decide *that*— he was to propose that your daughter should become his concubine!"

A storm of rage, fury, madness, threw the count's whole frame into dreadful commotion, as he wildly started from his chair, and stamped his foot on the ground with a violence that shook the room. Thunder was in his voice, and lightning seemed blazing from his eyes, while within his heaving bosom a tempest of passions was  
struggling

struggling to vent themselves.—“Cursed be the heart that dared to nourish such an hellish wish!” he vociferated, “and doubly cursed the tongue that dared to utter it!”

“Do not—do not let it thus frightfully ruffle you, my lord; let pity, horror, or contempt, at so foul a thought, restrain your anger. It was a vile wish, I own, but it is now no more—I have smothered it in embryo. Did you not promise to listen with calmness?”

“Calmness! said your highness? Bid the roaring sea, when hurricanes impetuously sweep over its foaming surface—bid *it* be calm; but tell not a father’s watchful ear to listen calmly to so gross an insult, offered to the virgin innocence of his child! I’ll see the king myself, and——”

“Hold, my lord!” cried the alarmed Leopold, detaining him, as, forgetful of every thing else, he was hurrying towards the door; “for Heaven’s sake—for your own sake, stop, I beseech you! be not so rash—recollect he is your sovereign; you

would not assuredly lift a traitorous arm against him."

In Leopold's grasp he seemed to be mechanically withheld, and quite unnerved by his agitation, he sank upon the chair he had just quitted, fixing on the almost trembling duke a look, from which he would, if it were possible, have recoiled. —“ My arm shall not strike him,” said he, “ nor my tongue speak *treason* to his ear; but with that tongue I will send such stings into his very heart, that he shall wish some traitor's hand in mercy to tear it out, and bleach away the crimes that dye it now so black and horrible.”

“ I conjure you, count, to be more yourself; you surely remember your promise, and will not infringe it.”

“ Could I have anticipated *this* when I yielded such a promise? could I have—”

“ Hear me to the end—it is but justice to do so,” interrupted Leopold—“ justice to yourself, to the king, and to me! He is less guilty than you imagine, and if I  
can

can even partly wipe away a stain from my brother's character, it is my duty to do so. He would have had *me* bear the message of his unhallowed passion—have had me demand the lady Victoria as a gratification to his licentiousness! Indignant, not only at the debasing office he would have lured me into, but at the bare idea of offering to your illustrious house an insult so unpardonable, I spurned him—ay, spurned even a monarch, who could conceive so infamous a project. Struck with remorse, he frankly acknowledged his guilt, and the force of my arguments and my indignation. I reasoned him into a full conviction of it; his gratitude on contemplating the crime I saved him from, and the lesson I taught him, were my reward; every shadow of such a wish vanished from his bosom, and I forgave him.”

“ May Heaven forgive him also !” ejaculated the count.

“ Assuredly, then, your lordship will not withhold from him what you implore

the Divinity to bestow—you will also forgive him.”

“ *My* forgiveness can avail him little—it cannot wash from his conscience so foul a blot as one guilty thought has left upon it.”

“ Repentance *has* washed away that blot ere now, I trust. Man must make allowances for the frailties and faults of his fellow-man.”

“ I *do* forgive him, duke, but never, never can I *forget*, that the smiles of royalty are as deceitful as the sunshine of a winter’s day, whose transient treacherous brightness allures you from the shade, and then, woe to your credulity, comes the storm !”

“ Whatever may be your sentiments on this point, my lord, I place too firm a reliance on your word, on your honour, which no thoughts, no wishes of others can ever sully, to fear for an instant any further utterance of them. A word more, and all is told : the king entreated that I  
would

would never reveal what I *have* revealed to *you*, and which the possibility of incurring some unfavourable doubts in your mind towards me, by my silence, alone compelled me to. I promised compliance—those doubts exist no longer—I have cleared myself, pleaded successfully for my brother, and he must hear of it no more; were even the slightest hint of my visit here to-day to reach him, all his apprehensions would return, and nothing could banish them. He would for ever dread the sight of you, and his life would be a life of misery.”

“Your reliance is not misplaced. For your highness’s sake I will let the matter sink into oblivion.”

“But should his passion for your daughter, whom he really loves, urge him to come forward, and make proposals for her hand?”

“I would reject them!” said the count, hastily, and somewhat angrily; “the wo-

man he deemed only fit to be his mistress, *cannot* be fit to be his queen—but we will now let the painful business rest.”

This was exactly the decisive and final reply upon the subject that Leopold wished for; he had now performed his *chef-d'œuvre*—a summit of wickedness to which the very soul of guilt had hitherto appeared to him incapable of climbing.

Almost sickening at the contemplation of such an enormity as he had practised, and even astonished at the undaunted effrontery with which he had dared to proceed to such a length, he feared that one word more would hurry him down the frightful precipice on whose verge he stood; he therefore felt relieved when the clock, proclaiming the hour at which the count usually dined, afforded him what the warfare of his guilty conscience, with the outward composure it was necessary for

for him to preserve, almost made him feel that he required—an opportunity to depart.

The count was too well versed in court ceremony to ask him, at such a moment, to stay dinner; and, in truth, such a state of commotion had all his feelings been thrown into by their conversation—by the probability of his having his daughter restored to him—by Theodore's supposed unworthiness, his falseness, his base duplicity—and, finally, unworthy as he seemed, by his appalling death—that he was glad when the duke's departure left him once more to himself, ill calculated as he was to go through the ceremonies even of common politeness to a stranger.

CHAPTER IV.  
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With how secure a brow and specious form

He gilds the secret villain !

DRYDEN.

How dreadful, how insupportable is the presence of one towards whom we are conscious of having sinned ! how oppressive and full of horror to ourselves is the weight of our guilt, while we stand before him ! It can be equalled by no earthly torture, save when we are sufficiently awakened to it, the nameless dread we must feel in the presence of our Creator, where we are always.

Unhappily Leopold thought not now of the Divinity, nor from *his* frown experienced a pang, or for a moment shrunk ; his apprehensions were only in presence of
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the count; but now that he was fairly away from him, he felt as if a load had been removed from his heart, and that he could respire, could think, and could act, with his usual freedom. He was thus left at liberty to plan the finale of this iniquitous part, for as yet it was but half acted, and to complete his great masterpiece in the approaching interview with the king his brother—one whom he had so foully wronged, and whose vengeance, should his perfidy be detected, he had as much reason to dread. He was not blind to the dangers of his critical situation, and he knew that the only chance of escaping them lay in his proceeding through the whole as firmly as he had begun.

It was by no means part of his plan to mention De Willenberg's name to the king, or let him know that such a person was in any way connected with the Herman family. His majesty had, once or twice, heard of Theodore, as being one of

the officers under the duke, and one of the bravest ; but he knew no more of him, and had never for an instant suspected him to be an acquaintance or visitor of the count Herman's, much less one likely to become his lordship's son-in-law, by marrying the very woman to whom he had himself prof-fered his royal hand.

The report of his assassination had already reached Warsaw ; but still Augustus only knew that young De Willenberg had imprudently ventured into the forest, and had met the fate that might have been anticipated. He knew not that the hand of secret treachery had been at work, and would therefore be doubtless the less circumstantial in his inquiries relative to it. It was yet farther from his thoughts to mention any of the events that had really happened at the castle ; for if he could succeed in gaining Victoria, he saw the policy, nay, the absolute necessity of keeping her flight a secret at the court.

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If known, it would, in the first instance, lead to a discovery of the cause, and next to a detection of the whole naked truth—a dreadful detection of the deception he had practised, and he shuddered to think of the disgrace that would fall upon him, should the slightest hint of the circumstance come to the king's ear—it would immediately expand into certainty; the latter would hasten to the castle, to ascertain all, and try to comfort the unhappy father, who had been his early friend; the fatal facts would then be explained, and himself stigmatized and disgraced for ever.

Thus resolved, he reached the palace, where the king was in his closet, ready to receive him. There was something, or he fancied there was, in the monarch's looks, which at first almost awed him from his purpose—an air of majesty, and a proud dignity, that seemed ready, with a single glance, to annihilate the one who would

dare to insult his ear with falsehood. But Leopold betrayed no discomposure; not an evidence, not a shade of guilt, was visible in his features or his deportment. His brother's aspect softened into all its natural sweetness and benignity, and, encouraged by it, he seated himself opposite.

Augustus's finely-animated countenance interrogated him before his lips did.—“Now, my dear brother,” said he, “I am prepared to hear the result of your embassy—what said the count Herman? how received he my proposal?”

A sort of doubtful look, something between an expression of disappointment and satisfaction, preceded Leopold's reply.—“With all possible gratitude for the honour you designed him, with high respect for your majesty's person and station, but he humbly entreats your gracious permission to decline it.”

Leopold's

Leopold's hesitation, before he faltered out the last words, sufficiently told what was to come, and disappointment instantly blanched the king's cheek; resentment at a refusal was beginning to contend in his bosom against his better reason, but it strove against too powerful an opponent, and was quickly subdued.—“He has absolutely declined it then?” demanded Augustus; “and upon what grounds?”

“The most conscientious ones, my liege; though, for his own sake, I regret, not the most politic. Both profess themselves enemies to ambition: she feels not that sentiment for your majesty which would justify her receiving so rich a gift; all the reverence a subject ought to feel for a sovereign she does, but the heart is capable of *warmer* sentiments, and in *her* heart those have already been excited by another.”

“Deserving, fortunate, happy, must that other be,” exclaimed the king, “in possessing such a treasure. Exalted, noble-minded woman! higher, infinitely higher do

do thy virtues raise thee than all the boasted power of royalty could do! thus magnanimously to forego all the wealth and splendour of regal dignity—thus to sacrifice all that could tempt the vanity of woman, from motives which, being thy soul's ornament, so truly aggrandize thee!" He could not help sighing at the conviction that this amiable being had bestowed her affections on another, and never, never would be his.—“ Know you,” he continued, “ for whom is reserved that hand thus refused to a monarch ?”

Again Leopold hesitated, apparently unwilling to avow that he did know; but the question being repeated—“ I confess, my liege,” replied he, with affected reluctance, “ that I *do* know; but, I pray your majesty, press me no further on the subject—I would withhold his name; the cold-veined stoic, knowing not its sterling value, declined the proffered gift.”

“ Can it be possible that you are serious, Leopold? can such a being exist? I
would

would know who, or where, in my dominions, is the unfeeling monster (man he cannot be, who has no heart) that would reject such a woman as Victoria.”

“It may surprise your majesty to know it, and to know that monster is so near you. *I*, my liege—*I* have rejected her.”

Amazed, astounded, the king drew back to some distance, still keeping his eyes intently fixed on Leopold, and doubting whether his ears had not deceived him.—“You rejected her!” repeated he, smiling at a thing he deemed so improbable; “if you did, then you are not Leopold, duke of Silesia. It is said that his highness has gained some credit for his gallantry of late in that quarter.”

“Believe not such a thing, my liege,” exclaimed the alarmed duke, nearly thrown off his guard by the king’s good-humoured but unlucky observation; “who dared to speak so lightly of me, spoke falsely; and Leopold, duke of Silesia, as *I am*, has yet
seen

seen no woman whom he will ever make his duchess."

"And yet I have offered to make her my queen—and she preferred you, Leopold, to the one who would have placed her on the throne of Poland! Is your highness then *so far* exalted above common mortals, that *she* is unworthy of you? or is it that you either possess a heart perfectly callous and insensible, or no heart at all?"

Leopold saw now that, so far from meeting any opposition from his brother to his passion, he had every thing to hope; but still dissimulation must do all for him—his heart dared not yet peep forth from the mask that concealed it.—“Augustus,” said he, “you misjudge me; I *have* a heart, and it is not an unfeeling, insensible one: although I have beheld Victoria almost with indifference, that might not be the case; I might perhaps not be so well able to resist such powerful fascinations as her
beauty

beauty throws around her, did I not know and feel the duty I owe my sovereign."

"Why and how has that interfered?— But I understand you, Leopold; *my* interest, *my* happiness, have had the precedence in your thoughts; you secretly admired Victoria, but deemed it your duty to *me* to endeavour to conquer nature herself; and, making a noble sacrifice of your own affections, you strove to cease your admiration of her, that you might obtain her for your king. Have I not now rightly guessed the cause whence you rejected her?"

"You have indeed, I avow," replied the unblushing Leopold, unhesitatingly.

"Then thus are all *my* hopes of her annihilated;" and as the generous Augustus said this, to assure his brother that he resigned his pretensions to her, he could hardly repress a tear, that would have instantly told what a pang that resignation cost him.

With

With secret exultation Leopold saw his struggle with himself; he had partly gained his ground, and it was plain that a little more skilful manœuvring would obtain possession of the whole.

“ May the hand of the woman you love be the reward of your magnanimity !” continued the king—“ a more precious one you could not have ; and since she cannot be *mine*, my greatest joy will be to see her the wife of my brother—yes, wed her, and be as happy with her as you deserve to be !”

“ Never,” cried Leopold, assuming a dignified resoluteness. “ Does your majesty think me base enough to purchase that happiness at the expence of yours? to marry the very woman you had condescended to make choice of for a wife—to snatch her thus from you for ever? Until now, I believed that you would indignantly repel the imputation of an unworthy action uttered against me by any
other

other tongue; but such a thing uttered by *yourself*, my liege, I almost doubt in the very hearing."

"You do yourself and me injustice, Leopold, in thinking thus. I know you to be noble and generous, as your conduct has proved you on this occasion: I would not be less so; therefore, I repeat, if her choice meets her father's concurrence—and why should it not?—dismiss those scruples, and receive a wife whom the whole kingdom might envy you the possession of."

It seemed now quite time to take him at his word, lest any further reasoning should influence him, and defeat its own end; and in an undecisive sort of voice, which he left the king to interpret as he pleased—"Has your majesty," he asked, "well considered what you would do? would you indeed so magnanimously relinquish all chance of the beautiful Victoria's hand, because she cannot bestow her affections on you—because her unambitious

tious heart seeks, in an humbler individual, its kindred one—in fine, merely because she now loves another?”

“The most undeniable, the most urgent reason,” returned the monarch; “affection, mutual affection, is the pure and lasting basis upon which all connubial happiness is built; it is the strongest bulwark to a woman’s honour to love her husband.”

“But mark me, Augustus; woman, we know, is vain—and frailty is so incorporated with her being, that she whom man *besides her husband* loves, stands on the brink of ruin—one further step plunges her for ever into its dark abyss. Our first parent, Eve, stood for a while irresolute between Heaven and her tempter; but soon woman’s frailty betrayed itself—the apple lured her—she tasted, and she fell.”

“I perceive what it is you fear, Leopold; but though I loved Victoria, yet adulterous blood flows not through my veins, to warm them with an unhallowed
passion

passion for my brother's wife; no—I will carry still further that magnanimity you applaud than relinquishing my hopes of her—I will turn my thoughts now to choose some other woman for the partner of my throne, who will divert them from *her* altogether.”

“As you have resolved upon this, sire, and that it is your gracious wish that I should accept the lady Victoria's hand, be it so; I will no longer hesitate; for it is no longer improper to avow, that the first sight of her inspired me with wishes and sentiments such as I had never known before, and nothing but a sense of duty to my king, and the sacredness of the trust reposed in me, could have withheld me from laying my fortune and my ducal coronet at her feet.”

Little more was now requisite—he had gained a complete victory over the unsuspecting Augustus, and had, in fancied security, reached all but the extreme summit

mit of his nefarious plot. The recollection of Victoria's flight caused him but little uneasiness, however alarming such a circumstance in reality was, as he was of opinion that the sudden and mysterious disappearance of her lover had alarmed her into the desperate resolution of seeking him herself, wherever it seemed likely that she might find him; and he entertained no doubt that she had, as the count had suggested, made her way directly to the town where his regiment was stationed. Thither, therefore, it was his intention to proceed forthwith; and even not finding her there, he believed that he should, by continued inquiries, be able easily to trace the route she had taken; it was his determination, at all events, to pursue his search over the whole kingdom, should it be necessary; and, to furnish a plausible excuse for his absence, he told the king that it was his intention to set out immediately for Herman Castle, to communicate the result of this interview to the
count,

count, and to propose himself for lady Victoria; after which, he said he should visit his regiment for a few days, or perhaps longer, according as he might find the place agreeable or otherwise. Having got every thing in readiness for his journey, he bade the king a formal adieu, and leaving him totally unsuspecting of the real state of affairs, he set forward, not to Herman Castle, but through the neighbouring country, in search of our fugitive heroine.

It is asserted, and probably with much truth, that in general those minds are most prone to suspicion that are the most intimate and familiar with vice, as the perpetrator of a crime is ever in dread of treachery in an accomplice: guilt may, in fact, be compared to the heart; and suspicions are as so many ramifications, like the veins and arteries, that carry their own nourishment to and fro. The bosom of Augustus was free from guilt, from deceit, and from suspicion—

suspicion—he deemed men incapable of vice, until he had received convincing proofs to the contrary; and to this was it chiefly owing that Leopold had escaped thus undetected and in safety. Generosity may sometimes be carried to so great an extent, that, if it be not a fault, it is at least a culpable weakness: such it is when we make those sacrifices to others which produce unhappiness to ourselves, much more than counterbalancing the pleasure resulting from the consciousness of our having contributed to the happiness of another. So was it with Augustus when he had relinquished Victoria, when Leopold was gone, and he felt that he had indeed not a moment hesitated to purchase his brother's happiness at the expence of his own. The regret he experienced was, however, far from being of that selfish nature that little-minded people are apt to feel when their own gratifications are made subordinate to those of others; his heart sighed after Victoria, not because his brother

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ther would probably possess her, but because he himself had lost her; yet even thus to sigh for her he sometimes thought ungenerous and unworthy; and after communicating to his prime minister and favourite what had passed, he sought every means in his power to banish from his lingering affections for ever an object so dangerous and so inimical to his peace.

CHAPTER V.
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'Tis not my talent to conceal my thoughts,
Or carry smiles or sunshine in my face,
While discontent sits heavy at my heart. ADDISON.

THE letter that had brought these bitter and accumulated griefs upon the noble house of Herman was from madame De Willenberg, and the black seal on the outside served partly to proclaim the melancholy tidings within. From the first two or three lines, Theodore had instantly gathered the import of the whole, but so violently did they agitate him, that it was not until, in the solitude of his own apartment, he had fully prepared himself for the worst, he could venture to proceed in the perusal of it; he then read, with all the

the attention they required, the following lines:—

“ THEODORE,

“ The wreck of happiness at your once-peaceful home is complete—it is sunk in an overwhelming ocean of misery for ever; deeply have I drank of the cup of sorrow, and, alas! the very dregs have forced themselves upon your wretched mother—wretched indeed is that mother, who cannot tell of her own sufferings without making her beloved child a participator in them! But, alas, my Theodore! too deeply do you already participate in them; and whence should I affect concealment?—yes, the whole dreadful truth must be divulged to you; but I will do so with all a fond mother’s tenderness.

“ Your father, that being whom nature taught your young heart to love and reverence, is no longer a wanderer in this world of sin and sorrow—he is gone for ever;

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and,

and, oh! would that I could say he descended to the tomb in peace and tranquillity with all mankind! Must I indeed avow, that the one whose image ruffled the last solemn moments of fleeting life was his child—his only child—yourself, my son?—heart-rending conviction!—Oh, Theodore! the hand that wrote your last fatal letter to him must surely for the time have been unguided by your heart, unwarmed by its pure current—remorse and self-reproach must have paralyzed that hand, when it had ventured to write such a letter to a parent. Yet, ah! my much-injured boy! how greatly has that parent wronged you! how greatly failed in *his* duty to *you*!—this it was that incensed—maddened you, and you knew not what you had done. But I will briefly hurry over the painful facts; to dwell upon them thus, is but probing and irritating the wound I fain would heal.

“Your father had no sooner read that letter, than, exasperated almost to frenzy, he

he denounced his curse upon you, in the moment of passion; at that dreadful moment, excess of rage gave his whole form and face an appearance truly appalling; such an exertion of all the powers of nature was too much for his frame to sustain—a blood-vessel suddenly gave way: this circumstance was the sure harbinger of death, and he sunk rapidly. Aware of his approaching dissolution, he instantly sent, spite of all my tears, entreaties, and remonstrances, to summon his notary, to draw up a fresh will, entirely hostile to you; so determined and implacable was his resentment against you, that even the insignificant allowance you have hitherto had is now taken from you, and your name erased from every part of the will; the brilliant prospects that opened to you in the first dawn of life were early dimmed, and now, alas! have faded from your view for ever; the ample fortune you had reasonably hoped to enjoy, is now gone to aggrandize a stranger—the count Konin-

gern—one who wants it not, whose possessions are already great and splendid; but he is one who, I am sure, will not use it unworthily; and as the deed *is* done now past recall, it is bootless in us thus to deprecate it. But let us hope, my dear Theodore, that your Heavenly Father will provide for you, as your earthly one cast you off. And surely too a ray of consolation remains, while such a man as the count Herman is your friend; may he ever continue to be such! and much I fear that is the only relative situation in which he can ever stand towards you. Seek no higher distinction from him now, my Theodore, for the poor and portionless De Willenberg must no longer aspire to be the son of one of Poland's wealthiest nobles—every law of honour and self-respect interdicts it. The count is, we know, too just, too honourable, to retract a promise given under even happier auspices; but think, my child, whether it would be fair and honourable now to take
advantage

advantage of that promise—think in what a light your accepting his daughter's hand would appear, under the present circumstances—certainly the most unfavourable to the scrupulous delicacy of principle you have always maintained; but your own excellent heart will best direct you how to act—be guided by that ever-faithful monitor, and I am confident you will not act wrong. To none, in competition with the amiable Victoria, would I give the preference as a daughter, for none do I know more calculated to contribute to the domestic comforts that should ever attend the marriage state. But I will offer no further advice upon this important subject. That Heaven may direct you for the best, is the sincere and fervent prayer of your affectionate mother,

“ADELAIDE DE WILLENBERG.”

Again and again did Theodore peruse this mysterious and wonder-exciting letter:

ter: in what instance he had committed such an outrage on the respect he owed his father, *as* a father, as he was thus charged with, he could by no means recollect: he had, it is true, incurred his serious displeasure by refusing to marry Maddeline Klopstock, one whose inferior birth and uncongenial manners and disposition in a great measure justified that refusal; he had subsequently displeased him still more, by embracing the profession of a soldier and a hero, for which nature seemed to have designed him; so far he had acted perhaps culpably; but never had his feelings, at the unjust and illiberal extent of that father's unkindness, hurried him into so flagrant a breach of that veneration in which every law divine and human commands us to hold the authors of our being, as to address him in a manner so offensive and audacious as the letter attributed to him must have been. Perfectly satisfied of his own innocence with regard to it, he naturally set himself to consider

ardently, admired Victoria, was a too evident and painful conviction; for love, though so noble a passion, is still a selfish one, and will no more share with another a particle of the heart it fixes on, than an infant will relinquish its most precious bauble. Of the particular attentions of any body to Victoria, he would have been jealous; but, however repugnant to her, those attentions had certainly been paid to her by Leopold, whom he now could not help regarding as the one whose aim was to supplant him entirely in her affections, by making him appear unworthy of the favour or countenance of his father, which such a letter was just calculated to do. Alas! it had already partly accomplished its object; and, oh! what anguish to think that it might eventually complete it, by convincing Victoria that she was acting imprudently, in continuing to encourage the addresses of a man, poor and destitute of every thing to offer her but an upright and affectionate heart!

Yet

Yet thus decidedly to condemn him on an accusation without actual proof, appeared to him, on a little reflection, to be highly unwarrantable and ungenerous; for was it not possible that some other might have written that letter, and without such a motive too as he had imputed to its author? Many were the possibilities that suggested themselves; he recollected that Victoria was not admired by himself and Leopold only, but by all who had ever enjoyed a moment in her society. Several of the officers of his regiment had oftener than once expressed themselves warmly in her praise. Might not envy at the chance of his monopolizing such a woman, have excited some of them to an act they would otherwise have shrunk from, with the hope, perhaps the intention, of addressing her seriously themselves?

Wearied with these vain surmises, and alternately dismissing and recalling them, he determined on a mode of ending at
G. 6. once

once his uncertainty—namely, to see the letter, and endeavour to discover to whose handwriting it bore a resemblance; he knew that of most of his brother-officers, and also of their royal commander, and this appeared to him an infallible way to prove or disprove his suspicions completely. Agitated and distressed by the peculiar delicacy of his situation, which required that he should keep the whole circumstance entirely from the knowledge of all his friends at the castle, he deemed it advisable, though it would be painful in the extreme to his feelings, to depart clandestinely, and at an early hour, on the ensuing morning.

Never had he beheld a day of such complete wretchedness linger out its dreary course, for never before had he been really unhappy; all his assumed fortitude was but a temporary mask to his feelings, for, the moment he had retired to his apartment for the night, all that fortitude vanished,

nished, and with it all that had controlled those feelings so long—he gave way to the full tide of them, and, spite of his natural strength of mind, he could not prevent himself from shedding a flood of tears. It was necessary, however, that he should collect himself, for a painful task yet remained to him, to which, he feared, all his powers would scarcely be adequate—that of addressing to count Herman a few lines, accounting for his flight in the least alarming manner, should he not return within a certain time—and that he should *not*, appeared indeed but too probable. Under this melancholy impression, rendered still more so by the idea that he was now about to leave, perhaps for ever, the being he loved most on earth—Victoria—voluntarily quitting her, and rushing, perhaps to death, it required a degree of firmness that nothing but the desperate resolution he had taken could furnish him with, to write the following letter:—

“ Ere

“ Ere these lines shall reach your eye, my friend, my benefactor, the unhappy writer of them may be far, far removed from all earth’s joys and sorrows: few indeed of the former have fallen to his lot, yet, oh! those few have been of the most delicious, most exquisite nature; but they were as the transient summer’s sun, which quickly passes away, bringing stern lingering winter in its rear. Once I boldly thought true happiness was of this world, as well as the next; but my ignorance and folly have been punished, and I am undeceived.

“ Let a few words, my lord, suffice to account for my quitting thus secretly your hospitable roof, beneath which all of happiness I have ever known was mine. If I return not, it imports but little to know what drives me hence; if I *do*, you shall know all. Yet even now will I write what perhaps my tongue may never be able to tell; all is mere suspicion still, but soon may all be changed to certainty. At
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the first step I sunk in my father's favour, some treacherous heart projected my ruin—resolved to plunge me into the lowest depths of human suffering—to load me with a parent's malediction; and the hand of villainy was ready to execute the diabolical plot that the heart conceived: a dreadful fatal letter, to which my name was forged, was sent to him, and my ruin is the consequence. But I will seek the base miscreant who has thus dashed from my lips the cup of happiness—yes, over the wide circuit of the world I will seek him; and if my arm inflicts not his punishment, there will at least be some consolation, should it even perish in the attempt.

“ I have now, my lord, said all that is necessary I should say at present; and now comes the agonizing word, *farewell!*—agonizing indeed, when I reflect that it may be the last; that I may never re-enter Herman Castle—never again hear the voice of her I love—never see Victoria

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ria more!—Oh! this, this is too much!—my spirits—all, all my fortitude fails me, and I can write no longer.”

Overcome by these emotions, he laid down his pen; the idea of all he had said being realized—of what Victoria's feelings would be on reading this, checked him for a while—he seemed undetermined; but his mother's letter recurring to him, again reminded him of his wrongs; and, determined to seek redress, he hesitated no longer, but sealed the packet and directed it, with the proviso that it was not to be opened for three days.

The worst struggle with himself was now over, and, with a heavy heart, he prepared for his departure. His apartment being in a part of the castle rather remote from the other sleeping-rooms, there was the less difficulty to be apprehended; besides which, there was a door contiguous to

to it, as we have before mentioned, leading into the wood, through which a long and circuitous path wound round to the high road; and having in the daytime procured the key of this door, he knew that no obstacle remained to retard his flight.

After waiting anxiously until all within the castle was profound silence, and its inmates buried in sleep, he at last cautiously ventured forth. So much time had passed away unnoticed in the task of writing the letter he had addressed to the count, that until now he did not perceive the rapid advance of morning, and the hour of four found him lingering yet at the little door, at one moment wishing, and the next dreading, to go. The moon, which had shone in full splendour through the night, was gradually disappearing from the firmament, and the eastern clouds receding at the approach of the magnificent Aurora, who, arrayed in all her rich and
roseate

roseate hues, at length emerged from the gloom of twilight ; cheered by the beautiful and enticing appearance of the morning, he moved forward on his journey, which he was obliged to perform on foot.

His mother's house was now his destination—that house, that home to which he had so long been a stranger : and, alas ! how painful were the causes of his return to it—his own injuries, and his father's death ! It was situated at a considerable distance from the castle, and to walk there would, he knew, require, from the time of his setting out, at least six or eight hours—but there was no alternative—and having got clear of the precincts of the castle, and reached the high road, he proceeded swiftly onwards.

He had ever been the darling favourite of his mother, and as she was equally beloved by him, the thought of embracing her, after so long an absence, acted as a
stimulus

stimulus to his spirits; and he hurried towards home on the wings of filial affection. In the transports of their first meeting, both mother and son forgot that there was any thing to cut short the happiness they for some minutes experienced; but memory, ever more faithful to our sorrows than our joys, soon restored those they had to deplore, and brought them to a sense of their really-unhappy situation. A long time elapsed ere he had courage to make any inquiry respecting his father, though impatient to see the letter that had brought on him the displeasure of that father, which had terminated only with his life. Judging what was passing in his mind, and that he feared to touch upon the subject, though anxious to do so, his mother, as gently as she could, mentioned the circumstance of his father's death, and then gradually turned their conversation to what he wished—the letter, which she presently afterwards put into his hands. If he had been before
amazed

amazed at so unmerited an accusation, how was he now thunderstruck at seeing the letter, so exact an imitation of his own handwriting, that it was next to impossible that any body but himself should not be deceived by it! At the first moment of glancing at it, he started with a sensation almost amounting to doubt. When such was its effect upon himself, how then was he to convince his mother that he was not the author of it? To say he had *not* written what bore so perfect a resemblance to his usual writing and style, was preposterous, he thought; but to let her remain longer in the opinion that he *had* written it, would be injustice to himself. Before he ventured any comment on it, however, he read it over in unbroken silence. Every line of it breathed a spirit of the most daring opposition and disobedience, and sentiments of the strongest contempt and resentment for the past: it described him on the eve of marriage with the wealthy heiress of Herman Castle;

Castle; and unalterably determined to pursue his military career, haughtily relinquishing every claim to his paternal friendship, or his fortune, and spurning the trifling and despicable sum allowed him, together with every other expectation he might still as a son be supposed to have.

Such was the termination of this insulting and unnatural effusion; and as he read it, madame de Willenberg kept her eye fixed firmly on his countenance. Horror-struck he dashed it from him, and throwing himself on his knees, he caught his mother's hand—"Can you for an instant believe I wrote that letter?" cried he. "Can my mother believe me such a wretch—such a vile and unprincipled wretch?" he demanded, raising his voice to a pitch almost terrific, as if to force from her an unwilling confession that she could not.

Alarmed by the vehemence of his manner, and affected at seeing a tear steal down
down

down his cheek—a tear that appealed powerfully and eloquently to all her feelings, she was instantly satisfied of his total innocence, and as instantly expressed herself so. Kissing him with all the maternal affection that ever characterised her—“Arise, my Theodore,” said she, raising him at the same time; “you stand acquitted of this whole transaction.”

“But how will you account for it—if *I* stand acquitted, say who is to be accused? It *must* be accounted for—*somebody* you surely must and do suspect, and *who* is that somebody?”

“It can be only some secret enemy,” she promptly replied; “there are none of us without such; and you, my son, might as reasonably think yourself exempt from death, the common lot of mortals, as from the crosses and misfortunes attendant on our course through life—but thus let it perish, and be for ever forgotten,” she continued, advancing towards the fire-place,

place, with the intention of committing it to the flames.

“No, no, no,” he hastily exclaimed, detaining her, and snatching it from her hand, “infamous as it is, I still have use for it.”

“*What* use would you convert it to?” demanded the alarmed mother.

“To avenge my wrongs!” was his reply; and as he uttered it, his voice assumed something so dreadful and determinate, as momentarily to convey to his mother’s mind a conviction of the truth, that there was somebody whom he suspected, and was about to accuse openly: nay worse, whom, perhaps, his impetuous temper might lead him to challenge to combat.

If such a step as this he meant to take, she trembled for the consequences.—“Say what is it you would do—what madness would you be guilty of, Theodore?” cried she, fixing on him a look that at once informed him of her suspicions.

“I will

“ I will not act madly or rashly, believe me,” answered he : “ I will coolly, but resolutely trace out the author of this execrable composition, and then prudence shall guide me. I will act as every law of real honour shall dictate ; and if ever I forget to vindicate that honour, then disown me as your son for ever, and say that I loved you not.”

A glow of magnanimity, brighter than he had ever worn before, overspread his fine features, as he said these words ; and madame de Willenberg gazed with rapture and admiration on a being who uttered sentiments so noble, delighted to think that he was her son.—“ Go then, my beloved boy,” she said, “ you possess a mind and soul that will shrink from imprudence ; be this affair entirely at your own discretion : I will not evince a want of confidence in you, by unnecessary caution and advice : you have my full approbation and reliance.”

Grateful

Grateful for that approbation, he pressed her hand to his lips, and endeavoured to beguile her for a while into cheerfulness, by assuming it in some measure himself.

His efforts were not lost upon her ; and when, after his promise to return, at all events in a couple of days, she gave him her parting benediction, she felt that he was infinitely dearer to her than he had ever been before.

He resumed his journey, however, in the most dejected state of mind ; a presentiment of ill hung over him, and he could not shake it off, though on his arrival at Zersk, it was necessary for him to appear amongst his brother officers, without any thing particular in his manner that might attract their observation or their satire ; for Theodore, with all his noble qualities, was but a man : he had his weaknesses and foibles as well as other mortals ; and he was now by no means in

a humour to bear the rallying jokes that were dealt indiscriminately amongst the gay and thoughtless young men of which, with very few exceptions, his regiment was composed.

He was beloved by them all, and was therefore received, as usual, with lively joy and hospitality; each was forward in congratulating him upon his supposed approaching nuptials; and many jested playfully with him on his having so sily won the heart of the fair recluse. This was, however, far from being a matter of triumph to him now; but he parried off their jokes with his accustomed good humour, and soon put an end to them.

As they were all to dine together that day, and to be honoured with the company of their illustrious commander, the duke of Silesia, De Willenberg was, of course, obliged to be of the party; and having, immediately after his arrival, con-
sulted

sulted an intimate friend on the subject of the letter, it was deemed advisable to produce it when the whole company were thus assembled, and watch well upon every countenance its particular effect. Never before had he so anxiously awaited the dinner-hour, though so little inclined to partake of its luxuries, or to add to its festivity. It passed as it was wont to do, accompanied with a strain of lively conversation, and all the interesting anecdotes of the day, in which Leopold took his part, with the perfect ease and gracefulness that always characterised him; but whether it was the ease of an upright and innocent heart, or that of a consummate hypocrite, it was difficult to determine.

To De Willenberg it was a spiritless and tedious meal: sorrow pressed heavily upon his heart, and the causes of it were consequently uppermost in his thoughts: he longed to have his suspicions of the infidelity of his brother officers to him

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either

either confirmed or entirely dispelled ; and as soon as dinner was over, he seized an opportunity to introduce the important letter, by a few observations tending to prepare them for it.

In compliance with the rules of etiquette and the general request, it was handed to the duke of Silesia, for the purpose of being read aloud. Every feature of Leopold's face yet remained unchanged—his hand was firm, and as he steadily and emphatically perused it, every one but himself at the table seemed struck dumb with amazement and horror at its contents. Not a shade of guilt was visible on his countenance, nor a comment did he utter until he had finished it.—“ This indeed,” said he, deliberately folding the letter, and returning it to Theodore, “ this indeed is an extraordinary composition—a most diabolical one, if it *be really* a forgery.”

Theodore's eyes flashed fire at the evident doubt this rude observation implied ;
but

but he knew that in order to discover the author, if he were amongst them, it was necessary that he should preserve all his self-command.—“ Whence should your highness think otherwise ?” asked he, eyeing the duke acutely.

“ Oh, in charity to all mankind,” replied Leopold, with a sort of evasive laugh, “ I wished not to believe any one so base—but, charity apart, is there nobody in particular whom you do, *bona fide*, suspect of having written it ?”

There was something in his manner of putting this interrogatory that struck De Willenberg forcibly, and he answered with the same earnestness—“ Yes, duke, there *is* one.”

“ Who is he ?” demanded Leopold, with energy, and half starting from his seat, forgetful for a moment of his usual proud and stately demeanour, in the interest he took in this mysterious affair.

“ Who is he ?” was echoed and reechoed by all present: “ De Willenberg, say

whom do you suspect?—can it be any of the company here assembled?”

“Certainly not,” returned the duke, instantly appearing to recollect himself; “nor is he obliged to make *us* his confidants.—I beg your pardon, sir,” he continued to Theodore, “for my impertinent curiosity; but having no particular motive beyond our feelings of regard for you, we cannot presume to press the inquiry; yet I must say, the charge is a horrible one, and should by no means be made or harboured against any individual without a positive proof of his guilt, and how are you to obtain that proof?”

“I will leave it to Heaven and his own conscience, whoever he may be!” answered Theodore: “if he *has* a heart, compunction will sooner or later reach it; he will *feel* and evince the enormity of his guilt, and will stand unmasked before me in all a villain’s deformity.”

“Beware!” vociferated Leopold, turning
ing

ing ghastly pale, and his hand flew instinctively to the hilt of his sword ; then hastily composing his ruffled features, he continued calmly—" I had forgotten the causes that hurried you on thus, senor de Willenberg, else it is not usual in others to forget that in my presence such violent language is unbecoming."

" Unbecoming deeds generally provoke unbecoming language," observed Theodore, rather sharply ; then in a sarcastic tone, unusual to him, he added—" Respect for your royal highness's *station* must silence even *my* wrongs. Let not the happiness or *harmony* of your present hours be further disturbed by *me*."

Whether De Willenberg meant more in this observation than might be explained, or Leopold *understood* more from it than he *wished* explained, we cannot at present say ; but frowning horribly for an instant at Theodore—" Let us drink," said he, addressing the company, " to the hap-

piness and harmony of our whole lives— may they ever be as calm and serene as at this moment.”

The letter part of this toast was at least ungenerous, after what De Willenberg had made them acquainted with ; for by most of his brother officers he was sincerely esteemed and beloved ; and most of them, too, forbore to repeat Leopold's concluding words, not thinking that they savoured exactly either of friendship or sympathy for him.

Hoping that the expression might have escaped without any particular notice from him, they changed the conversation ; but De Willenberg had heard, and was chagrined by it ; and notwithstanding his amiable and accommodating disposition, he could by no means put on the semblance of cheerfulness, that he felt not, for the remainder of the evening.

At

At an early hour the party broke up, and with a sorrowful heart he retired to the apartments he had hired in the town, unable to draw any positive inference with regard to the letter, which, after re-perusing, he again sunk into a train of mournful reflections, amongst which the belief of Leopold's being the author of it soon became predominant.

CHAPTER VI.
.....

The sun set red, the clouds were scudding wild,
And their black fragments into masses piled ;
The birds of ocean screamed, and ocean gave
A hoarser murmur, and a heavier wave. BARRETT.

WHILE going over in memory every word, every look, that had passed at dinner, a servant entered, and presented him with a sealed billet, saying it had just been delivered by a porter, at the street door, who instantly on leaving it had departed, but in what direction he (the servant) was ignorant. It was directed to De Willenberg, and in the handwriting of a stranger. Hastily tearing it open, he read with amazement the following words:—

“If you value your personal safety, sleep not to-night in this town, or its vicinity ;

vicinity; danger and treachery lurk near you, secure and unseen; nay, at this moment you are almost within their very grasp. The unlucky display of your letter to-day spurs the one who wrote it to further vengeance, which, if you fly not hence without delay, will assuredly overtake, and be fatal to you; if you would avoid it, you must hasten home, and by the *shortest* way, so as to arrive there before the darkness of night can veil a murderer's deeds; if you go not by such way, and with expedition, you are inevitably lost. In three days return hither—danger will then no longer exist, and the same hand that now warns you hence, will briefly reveal every circumstance pertaining to the letter. Fly! fly! I repeat, by the *shortest* road; let no consideration detain you, nor permit you to breathe a syllable of this; and, meantime, Heaven shall hear for you the prayers of

“ A SINCERE FRIEND.”

Horror for a while chained Theodore's every faculty, and rivetted him to the spot on which he stood when he perused this alarming billet, which was evidently, as its signature declared it to be, from a friend; but quickly recollecting the absolute necessity of rousing himself to action, and that his fate perhaps hung on the decision of a moment, he determined to profit by the kind admonition, and depart as speedily as he could, without communicating to any body the cause of this suddenly-formed resolution.

Twilight was now rapidly approaching, and there was nothing in the appearance of the evening to tempt him to a journey. The day had been excessively sultry and gloomy, and through the sky was now floating a thick train of murky clouds, that seemed every instant ready to pour forth their liquid burdens in a torrent of rain. That the night would be wet or stormy, he did not doubt; the whole appearance
of

of the weather was such, that nothing short of the treachery with which he was threatened, in case of his remaining, could have induced him to expose himself to the probable fury of the angry-looking elements on such an evening; but there was no alternative, and so he knew he must, in order to preserve perhaps his life.

Already, in imagination, he beheld the muffled assassin stalking beside him, scowling horribly upon him, and concealing beneath his blood-stained cloak a dagger, ready, at the instant of opportunity, to strike it to his heart. Nature shuddered at the appalling picture, and he again took out the latter, to convince himself that he had really such a thing to apprehend. He tried to recognize the writing, but in vain; it bore no similitude to any that he was acquainted with; but it was obviously the disguised hand of somebody, who wished not to be known. Aware of the danger and imprudence of delay, he lost but little

tle time in useless conjecture; and ordering his horse to be got ready with all possible expedition, he once more took the road towards home, and unaccompanied.

He had been cautioned to return by the *shortest* road, which, to his dismay, he now recollected lay through the vast and frightful forest we have before mentioned. Here there was another point on which to hesitate, for were he to venture by *that* way, should he not, in flying from danger in one shape, be rushing towards it in another? Many parts of the forest afforded retreats to the most abandoned and desperate characters, and the formidable clans of banditti that infested it, were the terror of the whole surrounding country; but then, on the other hand, should he take a circuitous route, and not reach home before night, there was every thing to be dreaded from the treachery of whoever his unknown friend's letter alluded to; so that, on the whole, he deemed it more prudent to encounter

counter the glittering and undisguised poniard of a bandit, than the concealed one of an infinitely more dreadful and dangerous being—an unrevealed enemy ; and accordingly towards the forest he guided his horse's steps.

As he rode along, he had leisure to recall to his mind all the occurrences of the day, and, by far the most important to him, the receipt of the anonymous billet. From the style and tenour of it, from the very circumstance itself, it was manifest that the forgery sent to his father was the production of somebody in his own regiment ; and so far suspense was at an end, for he was not at all at a loss to guess who that individual somebody in all probability was, though the motives that had prompted so base an act were not quite so evident. The most unaccountable part of the whole transaction was the warning he had received ; to whom to attribute it, he knew not ; it had unquestionably been dictated

dictated either by friendship for him, or horror at the magnitude of some plot formed against him; but it seemed likely that the writer either was in the confidence of the person he spoke of, or had by stratagem made himself master of his machinations and designs; and again, were he in league with him, would he have so far counteracted them? Each moment forming some new conjecture, which the reasoning of the next overturned, he could not come to any satisfactory conclusion. Time thus imperceptibly glided away.

His horse was jogging on with the slow and steady pace of perfect indifference to the perils that might await its master, or the alarming aspect of the weather, nor, until several large drops of rain beat heavily upon his forehead, did Theodore recollect the absolute necessity of urging the animal more quickly on. The rain now rapidly increased; the sky every instant grew darker and darker, till at length a sheet

sheet of uniform blackness covered its whole extent, as far as the eye could reach; all inanimate nature seemed tottering beneath the shrill blasts of wind that murmured gradually into a perfect hurricane—every thing around foretold the approach of a violent tempest, and hoping to be in some measure screened from its fury, by the thick foliage of the trees, he spurred his horse, and darted into the forest, whose gloom, in many places almost impenetrable, was sufficient to fill the most courageous bosom with fear.

It may easily be supposed that De Wil-
lenberg felt by no means comfortable, nor
free from the apprehensions natural to any
one in such a situation. Frightful and
dreary however as was the scene before
him, he could not but congratulate him-
self on having reached a place that afford-
ed him even a partial shelter, for at this
awful moment the storm burst forth with
such

such tremendous violence, as seemed to shake and convulse the whole terrestrial world; the rain fell in profuse torrents—loud and terrific peals of thunder rolled heavily through the whole surrounding atmosphere, which was presently illuminated at intervals by blazes of lightning, that flashed through the intermingled branches of the trees, giving them in many places the appearance of being on fire.

At the commencement of the storm, the horse had manifested several symptoms of terror, which were now communicated to De Willenberg, for it reared and pranced so ungovernably, that he every instant feared being hurled into one of the deep glens with which this wilderness abounded. On the first sound of the thunder, the alarmed animal became still more restive; but as soon as the lightning glared across its eyes, it reared itself, with a horrible noise, on its hinder legs for a moment,

moment, and plunged forward into the thickest, gloomiest, and most frightful part of the forest.

Between the pauses of the blast, the rough voices of several men in conversation were heard; but what they said, he could not distinguish, they spoke in so low a tone: he knew not whether to hail this as a signal of further danger, or of safety; they might be travellers benighted, like himself, in this intricate place, or (dreadful probability!) they might be a horde of banditti, waiting in ambush to rush upon whatever unfortunate being the tempest, and his unlucky stars, should lead thither, to seek a refuge from the inclemency of the night, waiting to plunder, and perhaps assassinate him.

This idea was more appalling to him than all the warring of the elements, and dreading much less from the thunder's crash, and the fierce blazes of the lightning,

ing, than from the treachery and cruelty of man, he determined not to discover himself, but remain quietly where he was, until the rain at least should have subsided.

His horse was, however, by no means in a humour to bear the beating of the storm so calmly; it continued to kick and tear up the ground, as if vying with the thunder itself in its ungovernable violence. In a few minutes De Willenberg's apprehensions were realized; a shot was fired by somebody in the direction whence he had heard the voices, and the animal, now totally unmanageable, with a tremendous bound, flung him off, and galloped away.

The shock was too great for his frame, already almost paralysed by terror and cold, to bear unhurt; all his senses at once forsook him, and he lay motionless on the ground. How long he had remained in that state, he knew not; but as his perceptions

tions returned slowly, one of the first and most discordant sounds that struck his ear, was the same gruff voice he had before heard amongst the trees, muttering just loud enough to be intelligible—"Pshaw! why the devil do we stay here? I tell you, Pierre, if we delay any longer, he will die outright on the spot, and, in truth, I have no great fancy for dragging dead lumber to the castle, nor do I believe that count Ferdinand has any particular liking for such unprofitable visitors."

"What is to be done with him if he dies before we reach the castle? We dare not leave his body exposed here," asked another voice, in a tone somewhat more gentle than the first.

"Done!" repeated a third, savagely; "why dig a hole, and bury him at once, and there will be an end of him."

"Holy saints! bury him in such a place without priest or Bible!" ejaculated the one who had asked the question.

"By the mass, that is a good one!" cried his

his companions, with a loud laugh ;
“ priest and Bible ! hah, hah ! a pretty
milk-and-water sort of a fellow you are !
but, egad ! if we want a priest, you shall be
our man ; that damned comical old hypo-
critical phiz of yours looks as if you were
reading the funeral service for the dead
already.”

“ And you and I will sing his dirge
over a bottle of stout old hock or constan-
tia,” exclaimed the first speaker, which
happy conceit elicited a still louder laugh.

From such a conversation De Willen-
berg could augur nothing very favourable.
There was little reason to doubt that they
belonged to a gang of desperadoes ; and if
so, he had fallen completely into their
hands, for, armed only with a harquebuss
and dagger, had he even possessed the
full bodily power of resistance, he was
aware how useless and absurd it would be
to contend against such a force as theirs ;
but opposition was quite out of the ques-
tion ;

tion; his fall had stunned, and in many places severely bruised him; and if they were the characters he apprehended, he saw that he had no alternative, and must resign himself patiently to his fate.

On opening his eyes, he found himself supported by two men of ferocious and forbidding aspect, who, in tones as unprepossessing as their countenances, congratulated him on his narrow escape from death. The other, the one who had appeared to be so shocked at the idea of consigning him unceremoniously to an unhallowed grave, was masked; and as De Willenberg's languid eyes ran faintly over his figure, he seemed endeavouring to shrink from observation.

“ Well, senor,” said one of the men, raising Theodore upon his feet, “ as this is no very comfortable birth for the night, what think you of going to a snug one
with

with us hard by, under as hospitable a roof as ever sheltered you from the fury of the black gentleman; for as sure as hell was made for those who choose to go there, the devil is out on his rounds to-night; and, as the moon usually pops her head behind a cloud as black as himself when he appears, he has brought a few tons of brimstone to light him along, and the very sky thunders to let us know he is coming."

"By St. Peter, then," said another, "if he is coming for us, I must beg to be excused a little longer; I am not tired of my life yet."

"Ay, ay, Fredolf," cried Pierre, "all in good time, my honest fellow! I warrant, when he does come for you, it will be high time for you to go. What think *you*, good ladylike gentleman, or whatever you please to call yourself?" continued he, addressing the one in the mask.

"That

“That he would not be so unkind as to leave *you* here after your comrade,” retorted the latter.

Of this one alone could De Willenberg form any sort of a favourable opinion. With regard to the others, still some doubts hung over his mind. Whether they were actually in the service of a bandit, he had yet to learn, although their language and sentiments shewed them to be ruffians of the most diabolical cast.—

“Let us away,” said they, each taking an arm of Theodore, and leading, or rather pulling him on, not very gently—“Come, my boy,” said Pierre, “come with us, and we will give you a treat, and I warrant, by this time to-morrow, you will feel neither ache nor bruise, nor any thing else the matter with you.”

“Ay, ay,” added Fredolf, “my lord count has prepared a *glittering* supper for him; but by all that’s infernal, there he comes himself yonder!”

“The devil!” vociferated the wretch to whom he spoke.

“No, but his brother, the arch-devil; we were sure of seeing one of the holy family at our heels to-night; but mum, Pierre, for his lordship looks as grim as the king of hell himself.”

With all the dastard servility that betrays at once the villain and the coward, they were immediately silenced by the approach of a tall commanding-looking man, who seemed, from the respect they paid him, to be their chief: his deportment was majestic, and calculated to exact their deference: he was of middle age, and his features, which evidently had been very handsome, and still were partly so, wore an expression of severe majesty, that shewed a determined spirit in every thing he undertook: his eye was large, dark, and piercing, and seemed as if at will it could dart glances of fire; his voice was naturally

ly

ly harsh and haughty; and in no very prepossessing tone he now demanded of Fredolf what had detained them out so long; to which the latter replied, as calmly as his savage nature would permit—"We have but obeyed your orders, my lord, in delaying; therefore you should not call us to account."

"Beware!" interrupted the stern chief; then softening his manner into more courtesy than it was obvious he was accustomed to assume, he turned to De Willenberg—"Stranger," said he, "you have apparently been a sufferer from the storm; you look faint and ill, as if you were wounded: I pray you say what has happened?"

"On my road towards home, signior," replied Theodore, in Italian, the tongue in which he had been addressed, "fearing no danger while I could defend myself, I entered this forest, both in order to arrive there more speedily, and to be in safety
I 2 from

from the storm. Scared by the lightning that flashed around almost incessantly, my horse grew restive, and hurled me insensible to the earth, where these your attendants found me."

" Luckily they did, or here had you perished," said Ferdinand.

" Ay, count, he might have been robbed and murdered by some of the blood-spilling gentry that prowl about this infernal place," observed Pierre, recalling the assurance which seldom, but in presence of his master, forsook him.

" It *might* have been," said De Willenberg, roused beyond himself by the remark, " and possibly my sword might have sent a few of them out of the world before me."

" You carry arms about you, young man?" presumed Ferdinand, fixing his full dark eyes on him, in which there was an infinitude of meaning.

" I *do*, signior," answered the other,
with

with striking emphasis, returning his gaze, "and know how to make use of them."

"Well, well, we are not going to put your skill in that way to the test," retorted the chief, rather disconcerted; "but," added he, brightening in a moment, "come along, I dare say you are a brave young fellow, and I am the count Ferdinand Velasco; if you will accept to-night a refuge in my castle, which is at no great distance, you will be a welcome guest."

"That he will, and a profitable one," muttered the mysterious character in the mask, in an under-tone, but so as to be heard by De Willenberg, who seemed to move on mechanically, at a loss to know what he ought to infer from this strange association of ruffianly insolence and politeness. To betray any suspicions of what they were, or their designs, would, he knew, be unsafe, should those suspicions be well founded; should they *not* be so, it would be highly ungenerous towards

one whose hospitality he was now constrained to accept, in his almost helpless situation, and who, however appearances were against him, might perhaps conceal, under a rough exterior, an excellent and feeling heart.

The total air of mystery which the masked stranger wore perplexed him still more, for his manner and his words were those of a friend, and one particularly, but secretly, interested for him.

Confident of this, he resolved, should an opportunity occur, to question him; and, as if in perfect safety while near him, he became less apprehensive, and accompanied them to the castle, as fast as his bruises would permit.

They seemed well acquainted with all the intricacies and all the difficulties and dangers of the forest. A chain of rocks on either side now bounded the road, forming

forming a long and narrow defile, overhung in many places by the projecting cliffs, and in others by the tall firs and pines that grew at their base, so closely intermingled, that even the vivid lightning, which still continued to illumine the face of the heavens, could not penetrate them.

Their progress was frequently impeded by fragments of rocks, which the mouldering hand of Time had separated, and by the underwood that grew there profusely.

As they advanced, a faint murmuring of water broke on the ear, through the intervals of the blast; and presently a small, but rapid current presented itself, gliding through the excavations of the rocks, and sweeping past the branches, that drooped beneath its surface, with an increased noise, that altogether added to the horrors of the

scene, though none but De Willenberg himself seemed to notice it.

At the further extremity of the defile, a rude bridge, constructed of some pieces of timber, stretched from one rock to another, across the water, which now swelled into a broader stream, and was again lost at some distance amongst the trees.

Not without considerable danger of falling from the unsteady planks, they crossed this temporary bridge, and having gained the opposite side, Pierre and Fredolf removed part of it, so as to prevent access to others, while Theodore, with the count and his masked attendant, moved slowly on.

They now descended into a deep and horribly gloomy dell, through which a path, rugged and uneven, wound amongst overhanging briars, that often impeded them,

them, and gave to the whole place such a wild and uncultivated appearance, that one would rather have supposed it to be the haunt of lions, tigers, and other savage beasts of prey, that had never beheld the "human face divine," than an avenue leading to the abode of man.

They stopped at length under the brow of a huge cliff, that seemed as if suspended in the air, ready every moment to fall and annihilate them; and removing some of the brambles and brushwood that crept along the ground, Fredolf grasped a massy ring of rusty iron, that had lain concealed in a receptacle made for it; and the next moment, employing all his strength to draw from its place an enormous trap-door, he discovered, to the almost petrified De Willenberg, by the hideous glare of a torch that blazed within, a black and dilapidated stone staircase, which they bade him descend, Pierre going first to carry the light.

Looking from the top, all was profound and unvaried darkness; and instantly the horrid idea occurred to De Willenberg, that they had trepanned him into a tomb, and were about to enclose him in the regions of the dead. He recoiled aghast from the infernal-looking gulph, and, forgetting his previous caution—"Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed, "whither are we going?" at the same time turning his eyes towards the one in the mask, as if he could have snatched him from whatever dreadful fate might await him. That one, on the instant, contrived to glide towards him, and evidently fearful of observation, whispered in his ear—"Be cautious—be silent!" when just as he had uttered the words, he encountered the fiercely-rolling eye of the chief, who, darting on him a scowl almost diabolical, commanded him to go down with Pierre, and they would follow.

"You see, signior," rejoined the chief,
addressing

addressing De Willenberg again, "you see this our ancient mansion is strongly fortified both by nature and art; it was built by my forefathers, at a time when all Poland was disturbed by internal conflicts of the most direful and sanguinary description. These barriers were deemed necessary, and often successful, in preventing the incursions of the enemy, into many which they would otherwise have plundered and then razed from their foundations; and even to this very day, the secret of removing them, to obtain ingress and egress, is known but to myself and a few others, and of those few none *dare* use such a secret unworthily, knowing me so well as they do."

He said the last words with so much emphasis, and glanced alternately at De Willenberg and the mask so significantly, that the former could not help putting an unfavourable construction on them, and giving up every hope of any assistance

from the one whose friendship he wished to be assured of; and the latter turned away, and began to descend the steps with Pierre.

Theodore, however, remembered his injunction, and without further opposition, accompanied count Ferdinand and the others in their descent, confident that the interdict against his murmuring or evincing any unwillingness, must have had some particular meaning connected with his personal safety.

But their difficulties were not yet terminated. After winding down a spiral staircase, damp, and in many places so broken as to render their footing uncertain, they alighted on a small square platform; and Pierre, touching a brass spring, instantly a little door, so ingeniously fixed in the wall that only the nicest observation could discover it, flew open, and presented on the outer side an arm of the stream

stream they had before crossed, but of much broader expanse. Its surface was ruffled by a cascade at some distance, pouring its torrents into it; and a small boat, which was moored close to the bank, was tossed to and fro by the agitation of the water.

The storm still raged with unabated force, and the thunder, awfully reverberated amongst the neighbouring rocks, almost made them believe that the very earth itself had opened, and sent forth, from its black and frightful caverns, all the mischiefs of the infernal world, to add to the general commotion.

Impatient to reach the castle, Pierre rushed out, and also his masked companion, in order to unfasten the boat; the others yet remained in shelter within.

“ This is an awful night,” observed the latter.

“ Awful !”

“ Awful ! ” repeated the hardened Pierre, with a sarcastic and fiendlike grin, “ damn me, that is a good one ! why, zounds ! what are you so cursedly afraid of, and we both promised to the devil already ? Confound him ! do his worst, he can but whirl us away with him, in one of these yellow blazes, to hell at once ! ”

At this dreadful fatal moment, the Divinity, whose omnipotence he had apparently altogether forgotten, hurled upon the abandoned and impious wretch his most tremendous and direful vengeance : a thunderbolt, so loud that it appeared to shake the whole firmament, rolled through the atmosphere, like the noise of ten thousand cannons, succeeded almost instantaneously by a flash of lightning, which, sweeping over his devoted head, struck him to the earth a corpse, and his mysterious companion fell senseless beside him.

CHAP.

CHAPTER VII.
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Nor here the radiant sun, at brightest noon,  
E'er smiles with cheerful rays, but feebly casts  
A dim, discoloured, and uncertain light ;  
No pilgrim enters here, unless misled ;  
But hastens far, with cautious steps, away ;  
And beckons travellers from the fatal road.

*TASSO'S Jerusalem.*

DE WILLENBERG, the chief, and even the ruffian Fredolf, stood for some minutes horror-struck and motionless, on beholding so terrible, so undeniable a proof of the divine wrath. Never before had they witnessed the judgment of Heaven upon guilty mortals so manifest or so tremendous, and a simultaneous ejaculation for its protection burst from each of them.—“ Lord of Heaven preserve us !” cried

cried Fredolf, at length venturing forward, to raise the two inanimates from the wet bank on which they lay extended—"Lord of Heaven preserve us, and keep us from such a death!"

"Amen, amen!" fervently responded Theodore and the count, as they proceeded to assist him.

The body of Pierre was heavy, and totally devoid of life; the cold moisture of death had spread all over it, and to lift it required all Fredolf's strength; but in the other the vital spark, though it seemed rapidly expiring, was not yet wholly extinct. Convinced that to revive him was still in their power, the humane Theodore promptly began chafing his hands and temples; but the chief more wisely suggested the danger of delaying there, and that if any chance remained of their being able to recover him, they had better proceed with all possible expedition to the castle.

He

He was quickly convinced of this, and helping them to disengage the boat from its fastening, they laid Pierre's corpse along the bottom of it; and the count and De Willenberg supporting the other sufferer in their arms, Fredolf took the oars in his muscular hands, and rowed away.

All thoughts of his own danger had fled from Theodore's generous mind at the instant of their awful fate; and now called upon to assist in saving the life of a fellow-creature, his exertions, notwithstanding the effects of his fall, were even far beyond their usual pitch, and the strength he had acquired in thus rousing himself seemed more than mortal. Intent on preserving their charge, if possible, from a death so premature, so horrible, every thing else was to him a consideration of minor importance, nor thought he of any thing besides, until his arrival at the decayed and time-worn mansion of the chief.

On

On landing from the boat, Fredolf took out a small bugle that hung within his vest, and sounding it so loudly that it was echoed almost throughout the forest, three men presently made their appearance from behind a huge oak tree, whose immense and ponderous branches concealed the entrance of a long vaulted passage, that led immediately to the interior of the castle. Their countenances were harsh and ruthless, but their naturally-gruff voices softened into tones of servility, when they beheld their chief, whom it was evident that they feared more than they respected.

They eyed De Willenberg with a malignant expression that boded him no good, but in his attention to his charge this escaped his observation.—“Come, Valentine,” said the chief, addressing one of them, “do you and Lopez assist to carry home Pierre, your dead comrade—you did not expect him home in this state.”

“Poor

“ Poor Pierre ! it is all over with him, my lord, sure enough,” said they, unfeelingly, as they slung him, neck and heels, across their broad athletic shoulders.

“ Ay, ay,” suggested Valentine ; “ egad ! the unfortunate devil has got a few bullets in his sponce at last. Many a corpse have these two shoulders borne to the grave, but curse me if ever I carried one so heavy as this before !—but come along, my lad.”

“ Shall I lend your excellenza an arm to carry that other dead body ?” asked Juan.

“ No, no,” replied Ferdinand ; “ this signior here (meaning De Willenberg), Fredolf, and myself, will take care of him ; do you take up the torch, and lead the way.”

Fredolf now secured their little vessel, after which, pushing aside some of the oak branches, a door in the rock, almost concealed by moss and weeds, admitted them into the vault ; and having rendered their

their safety quite certain, by bolting it, and drawing a huge chain across the inside, they proceeded through the dreary passage, which, as they went on, expanded so considerably in height and breadth, that the echo of their footsteps at every tread sent a sound almost terrific through the whole subterranean space.

A large door at the farther end, of curious workmanship, and having all the appendages of bolts and locks for security, at length was thrown open, and they entered a spacious hall, of Gothic architecture. It appeared to have been built in the style of at least two centuries before, for every thing bore marks of the ravages of time; and some nearly illegible inscriptions on the tattered and faded tapestry that hung here and there, and apparently had formerly extended all round, at once proclaimed its vast antiquity. From its length and height it had, to all appearance, been a banquetting-room; and in a gallery  
at

at one extremity, supported by columns of fluted marble, still hung in many places the moth-eaten banners of some ancient and illustrious house.

On the spacious pannels of the oak wainscot hung two full-length portraits, each surmounted by a coronet, massive and richly gilt. The figures were scarcely distinguishable through the sheet of dust that covered them; but as far as might be judged from the highly-finished style in which they had been executed, and the air of majesty and grandeur they exhibited, it seemed probable that they were the likenesses of former owners of the castle.

Two men and an old woman were waiting the return of the party, and the moment they entered, the wrinkled cheeks of the latter became blanched with horror at sight of the corpse.—“ Here, old Hobble-Gobble,” said they, advancing towards her, “ here is a whole carcase of human beef  
for

for you, fair and fresh, for it is just now killed."

"Jesu Maria!" cried Jacintha, averting her face from the frightful spectacle; "it is Pierre himself!—killed! oh, God forgive his wicked life, and receive his soul!"

"Hey-dey! good mother Mock-devil, give us none of your preaching, but tell us what you have got for supper to-night?"

"We will have *this* to-morrow night," added Lopez, with a facetious grin; then seeing count Ferdinand approaching close to them, he asked, with an air of profound gravity, how they were to dispose of the body?

"Take it to the charnel-house, and bury it at once," replied the chief.

And whispering Jacintha that she should have another instead of it the next night, they promptly proceeded to obey the order, and consign the corpse of the ill-fated wretch to the last gloomy receptacle of mortality.

"Now,

“ Now, dame Jacintha, for *your* good offices,” said the chief; “ we have never called upon your humanity in vain, so now we pray you summon up all your skill and all the kindness of your gentle nature, and with some of your potent drugs and cordials, restore this half-dead man to life again.—Here, Fredolf, do you and Gregory support him in your arms to his bed-room.”

In her terror at the sight of the corpse, and the savage observations of Lopez, Jacintha had not perceived that there was another also in a state to demand their attention, until Ferdinand made this appeal to her. Turning suddenly round, and seeing who it was, a shriek of horror suddenly burst from her—“ Holy Virgin! is *he* also dead?” cried she, and gasping convulsively, as if to retain life and reason within her own bosom, she reeled against one of the pillars for its support.

“ What is the meaning of all this agitation?” demanded the chief, alternately  
gazing

gazing at her, and the object of her alarm.

His voice of thunder electrified her. She looked as if she had involuntarily betrayed some important secret, and, as well as her confusion would permit, she stammered out—"Good, my lord, nothing indeed—nothing, I assure your excellenza; I thought he was—that is, I mean it would have been so very terrible if they were *both* dead, and——"

"How now, old Squeamish!" interrupted Fredolf; "I wonder what there would have been so *very* terrible in this, when, I would lay my life, you have seen a few scores of dead bodies before now! You are a little *nervous*, I suppose—ha, ha! capital!—by my faith! if you had but a fan, and were to faint for a few minutes, and then slowly recover, with the help of a glass of water, you could play off the modern fine lady to the very life."

"How can you be so unfeeling?" asked the offended domestic.

"And

“And so loquacious in my presence?” added the chief, with a haughty frown, from which Fredolf instantly slunk away. —“Come now, Jacintha,” he continued, “as they are *not* both dead, and this one is merely a little scorched and terrified by the lightning, employ all your potent skill in bringing him to himself again.”

Jacintha's countenance again brightened with hope.—“Ay, my lord, that I will,” she joyfully exclaimed; “Santa Maria be praised! there is still some life in him—I thought it was all over with *him* too.”

She now approached, and for the first time noticed De Willenberg, with a look of pity and alarm that spoke volumes to him. She appeared to be about to say something; but the chief narrowly observing her, awed her with a frown into perfect silence, and bade her accompany her patient.

“Come along, old Jezebel,” said Gre-  
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gory, instantly comprehending Ferdinand's significant glance; "come along, if it wont shock your virgin modesty to enter a man's bedroom;" and stealing another look at Theodore, she disappeared with her charge.

De Willenberg now sat down, to rest his wearied frame, on an antique couch, that stood in a corner mouldering to decay, and glanced fearfully round the hall, while all his suspicions of treachery on the part of his host revived. All he had yet seen was mystery, and his mind's eye retraced the strange and terrible events of the last few hours in as many minutes. He could not help thinking that his falling into the power of these people, if they were, as he suspected, a gang of banditti, was by no means the mere effect of chance, but a premeditated plot between them and somebody who might possibly wish for his death. He recollected the admonitory letter, and sometimes fancied it had been  
written

written to lure him into the very dangers of which it spoke. Then again this supposition appeared illiberal and ungrateful, and he believed that the kindest motives alone had actuated the writer, who could certainly not have foreseen what had occurred. It might also be uncharitable and unjust, from a few unfavourable appearances, to conclude at once that they were characters so disgraceful to mankind; though the language of most of them plainly evinced that their hearts were depraved, and their minds uncultivated. The character of their chief, too, seemed to be an extraordinary compound of ferocity and hospitality; but what appeared to him the most unaccountable, was their scrupulously avoiding mentioning the name of the person who wore the mask. He had some doubts as to his being one of their community; but were he even such, it was evident, whatever their mode of life or their crimes might be, that he either was not a participator in them, or,

at all events, was a reluctant one; from the caution he had received to beware of betraying his fears, he scarcely knew what to conclude, nor was he less at a loss to guess the meaning of Jacintha's looks, as she quitted the hall. If danger there were, he thought the unhappy victim of Pierre's impiety might have been of use to him, and on that account he doubly regretted his absence, and was doubly solicitous that he should recover, though he strove not to let that solicitude be observed.

His mind, however, was in so confused and agitated a state, and every thing round him had such a doubtful appearance, that the chief, as if reading his very thoughts, quickly came up to him.—“ Pardon my leaving you for a few minutes, signor,” said he; “ but expecting some guests here to-night, I wish to see that they are properly accommodated, previous to the ceremony of introducing you to them; should you

you require any thing before my return, Lodovico will attend to your commands." With a courteous bow he now left him, and ascending a staircase of black marble, that led to the upper apartments, was soon out of sight.

The moment he was fairly gone, Lodovico approached De Willenberg, and, with a degree of insolent familiarity, demanded how he liked his present quarters, and what he thought of the people about him?

Theodore would have repelled him with the contempt he felt, and which the other deserved; but hoping to glean something from the man's conversation, that might either dissipate or confirm his doubts, he did not discourage him, but circumspectly replied—"I have had worse quarters before now, for I have slept in a field of battle; as to the people, it is scarcely fair to ask my opinion of them yet—that must

be determined by their treatment of a benighted stranger."

"Treatment!" echoed Lodovico; "you will have the best of treatment; why, confound me! if the castle is not as crammed with company as it can be, from top to bottom; and count Ferdinand, who is as hearty a fellow as ever cracked a bottle, means to give us all a jovial supper to-night; and if you do not call that good treatment, damn me if I know what you do!"

"I thank you, my friend," said De Willenberg, "but indeed I wish not for festivity—it would ill accord with my feelings, unwell as I really am from the bruises I received in falling from my horse in the forest. Mirth would now be irksome to me, for I am neither calculated to enjoy it myself, nor to impart it to others; the only favour I would further request of the count is, when I have had the refreshment of a little food, that I might

might be permitted to retire to bed—I am much, very much in need of repose.”

“That, I suppose, he will leave to your own discretion, signor; but curse me if ever *I* was such a fool as to sneak off to bed whenever there was a good supper, and a bottle of wine, in the way; and I say *you are* a fool if you do so now.”

Still, even upon this unmannerly speech, De Willenberg forbore to retaliate.—“I think I should be more comfortable in bed than here,” observed he, gazing round the hall, through which two small lamps, hung at either extremity, threw a dim and uncertain light, scarcely more than sufficient to render “darkness visible.”

A ghastly grin spread over Lodovico’s pale visage as he drawled out—“Ay, ay, signor, you will soon be comfortable and quiet enough, I warrant; you do not mind a hard bed, you say, do you?”

“No, but why do you ask the question?”

“Because I think you will have but a

sorry sort of accommodation in that way ; marry ! we have got such a pack of visitors here to-night, that when half of them fall dead drunk under the table, as they will do by the dozen just now, egad ! there they may stay and snore snugly until morning—we have only beds enough for the other half.”

“ I fear, then, I shall be considered an intruder,” observed De Willenberg.

“ No, no, signor, do not fear such a thing ; we have always a bed for a stranger in the western turret, though the place, to be sure, is a little dreary ; but you must not mind that—many a brave fellow before you has slept in it.”

“ To wake no more !” added the voice of some invisible being, in a hollow and sepulchral sound, that ran in a slow and dismal echo through the hall, and chilled all the blood in the alarmed De Willenberg’s frame almost to an icy coldness.

“ Good God ! what does that mean ?” inquired he, staring wildly around.

“ Nothing,

“Nothing, nothing, signor!” replied Lodovico, in evident perturbation, “nothing at all; it was but the wind whistling through that great casement yonder: bless you! this whole dreary pile is as old as Methusalem himself—we hear these strange noises every night in the year—but where is the wonder of that?” why there never was a dismal old castle like this in the world without spectres and ghosts.”

As he said this, he shook involuntarily from head to foot, and turned paler than before, which soon betrayed that either superstition, or the workings of his conscience, operated powerfully on him, in spite of the tone of incredulity in which he spoke.

De Willenberg was, however, not such a lover of the marvellous, or so credulous, as to be satisfied with this evasive observation, though so plausibly delivered; his apprehensions of treachery and danger

were now at their height, and in all the horror with which human nature shrinks from the assassin's deadly blow, he fell back on the couch, and uttered a deep groan, while life's fresh and healthy hue fled from his whole face, leaving there an awful, ashy paleness resembling death.

A shrill whistle from Lodovico was the instant signal for the appearance of another domestic, who, bearing a flask of liquor, came running towards De Willenberg.—“ Now, now !” cried Lodovico, as he hastily snatched it, and applied it to the lips of the latter; “ here, signor, is a cup of our very best Falernian; come, drink it off, and it will make a man of you again.”

Nearly insensible, Theodore suffered him to pour a small quantity of it down his throat, which was parched with thirst then feeling somewhat revived by it, he was about to swallow the rest, when Ja-  
cintha

cintha returned, and running over, apparently to assist them in recovering him, she either intentionally or by accident brought her arm in contact with the cup, and dashed it, with its contents, on the floor, where it was shivered into atoms.

“The devil take the blundering, meddling old hag!” vociferated Lodovico, pushing her with violence away; “what, in the name of Lucifer, your father, brought you here? I wish he had you fast in his clutches once more.”

“Time enough when you are coming with me,” retorted the enraged Jacintha; “I warrant, when once you are safely lodged with him, he will never part with one who has sent him so many poor souls as you have done.”

The noise of the cup falling, and this subsequent altercation, tended to rouse De Willenberg, who seeing the broken vessel scattered on the floor, conceived that

she had destroyed it from the best motives—that she had preserved him perhaps from being poisoned, for he doubted not that it had contained some baneful and venomous drug: he looked what he dared not speak—his gratitude to her.

She was about to address him, when Fredolf observing both, (for the latter was by this time returned to the hall), and gazing on their proceedings, approached her, and as if anticipating what she was going to say—“Take care,” cried he, “take care what you are about, woman!” and he fastened his eyes on her, as if they would have pierced into her inmost thoughts.

Whatever his earnest and long-continued gaze meant, she understood sufficient from it to prevent her hazarding another word, until, to her great relief, he was gone; then, in a more submissive tone—“Now, senor Lodovico,” said she, “you and that grim-faced Fredolf have said  
your

your worst, and after all, what was the breaking of that cup but a mere accident? it might have happened to yourself; but if you wish, I will go and fetch some more wine for this stranger, though, to be sure, I do not much like a tramp down by the black vaults and caverns to the cellar to-night, either for him or any body else."

"No, no," replied he, rather appeased, "we will not send you on such a tramp now; the signor wishes to go to bed, and no doubt that will be the best restorative for him."

"Ay," said Jacintha significantly, "once he gets there, his pains and aches will very soon be over."

De Willenberg comprehended much from this ambiguous speech, perhaps more than she meant; but again taking the alarm—"I prefer," said he, addressing Lodovico, "I prefer staying here to-night to sleeping in the turret; my thoughts are already of too melancholy a cast to relish the gloom of such a place as you  
have

have described it, and if your lord will not object to it, I shall sleep contentedly on this couch."

"Sleep here, senor!" screamed Jacintha, in rather an *alto* tone; "holy saints defend us! I would not sleep in this hall, for my part, for all the wealth of the universe—God forbid I should! Oh! such groans as people have heard here at midnight, and such a sight as Pierre saw here one night before he died (Heaven rest his soul!) a few minutes before the great old clock in the eastern turret struck twelve—a bloody corpse wrapped in a winding-sheet, and a coffin—Lord defend us! on the very spot where you are now sitting. Jesu! how pale he looked when he told me, and my blood turned as if——"

"Hush, and be damned, you prating old beldam!" interrupted Lodovico; "can nothing stop that infernal tongue of yours? Surely, senor, you are not so silly as to believe a word of what she says."

"I confess such stories appear to be  
rather

rather romantic and improbable," replied Theodore, half smiling at her impressive earnestness.

"Improbable!" echoed she petulantly; "romantic and improbable, indeed! mighty well! but I have often told people the very same things before, and none of them would believe me until it was too late—more to their cost; ay, many a poor benighted traveller, like yourself, have I warned."

"And now," said Lodovico, "let me warn *you* that you had better travel instantly down stairs, and not stand gossiping your foolery here any longer—away!"

The offended dame muttered out her indignation at being treated thus, and was sullenly marching off, when De Willenberg, unable to conceal his anxiety longer, inquired how she had left her patient, and whether he was likely to survive?

"Yes, yes!" she hastily replied, as if grateful

grateful for having her tongue again called into action; "thanks to the Virgin, and my good care of him, he is coming to himself as fast as he can!"

"And a pretty sort of a nurse you are, you careless hag! to leave him at such a time," added Lodovico; "go, get you back to him, and stay there, or any where out of this."

"Ah, God forgive you!" said she; "I am sure, if I had not been afraid, and with good reason too, that you were at some of your old practices here, I should not have done so; but I hope you will be quiet for this night."

"Egad! if you don't take yourself off very quickly, I will quiet *you*, at all events," replied he; and, alarmed lest he should put his threat into execution, she peaceably took her departure.

"What an everlasting plague that woman's tongue is!" said Lodovico, when she was gone; "I would sooner listen to the whizzing of a whole field of artillery. The fool

fool would almost make one believe the place was haunted, in good earnest."

"Even if this hall *is* haunted," suggested Theodore, "I trust it is not in the power of the dead to injure us; it is from the living we have aught to fear; and, fortunately, we can from them in general defend ourselves; it is for the wicked only to tremble at these terrors of the imagination."

"Ay, senor, all very easy talking; but, in my humble opinion, it is better at any time to fight with the living than the dead; but, at all events, I am certain my lord will never consent to let you pass the night *here*."

"Methinks, as it is my wish, he cannot refuse, consistently with the rules of courtesy and politeness; is there any *particular* cause for his being averse to it—any mystery connected with the place?"

"Mystery! No," retorted Lodovico, "there is no *mystery*; but the count may have his own motives, which he may not choose

choose to explain to every busybody who asks."

"Of what family is the count?" inquired Theodore, with an assumed air of indifference; "it must be very ancient, if this castle is one of their estates."

"I don't know that neither; and, as I am not over inquisitive, I never asked, nor ever mean to trouble myself about it. We are all well paid and well fed, and that is enough for us to know; besides, count Ferdinand desired that we should never answer impertinent questions; but here he comes himself—mayhap he will tell you."

Unable to learn any thing satisfactory from the wary Lodovico, De Willenberg was angry with himself for not having at first repelled his insolence, but the chief approaching, withdrew for the present his attention from him.

"Now, senor," said the latter, "let us  
wave

wave the ceremonies of a new acquaintance; consider the house of your host as your home, and his friendship and hospitality your claim. Come with me—I wish to introduce you to our social party above, and make you one of the number.”

“ I thank you sincerely, my lord. Believe me grateful for your kindness, but indeed I would be excused; sadness and gaiety are ill-adapted companions. I should behold the smile of happiness, and hear the voice of mirth, without feeling their influence for a single moment. An unaccountable melancholy hangs over me to-night; therefore I pray you do not urge me.”

“ Young man, you appear to be apprehensive of harm,” observed the chief, in a tone of displeasure, and with something mysterious in his looks, that made Theodore in reality so; “ trust me, you are safe beneath my roof, though I am ignorant what it is you fear; your life and honour are as sacred as my own; but Lodovico shall

shall conduct you to the apartment prepared for you, since you *are* so uncourteous as to repay my kindness, as you term it, with suspicions—vile, damnable, unmanly suspicions! You may retire, sir!”

“ Pardon, count, my——”

“ No more of your lame excuses! the gaiety of my table shall not be disturbed by your mumpish melancholy whinings!”

“ But hear me for a moment!” implored Theodore.

“ I will hear you not! Lodovico, lead the way to the turret.”

“ Nay,” persisted Theodore, “ I stir not hence until you *do* hear me.”

“ Miscreant!” exclaimed Ferdinand, “ do you presume to brave me, even in my own mansion? begone!”

In an instant rage and indignation flashed furiously from the before-languid eyes of De Willenberg.—“ Accursed be the tongue that dares to call me such!” cried he, half-unsheathing his dagger; “ defend yourself, if you are a man!”

Quickly

Quickly recollecting himself, and aware that a word from the chief could summon those who would immediately overpower him, he returned the weapon to its case.

“ Bravissimo, signor !” said the chief, laughing contemptuously ; then his features darkening into a malicious and diabolical sneer—“ Reserve your heroic courage,” rejoined he, “ until it is put to the test ;” and sarcastically wishing him a good night, he reascended the marble staircase, to join the party, whose noisy revelry was heard above.

After Ferdinand had disappeared, De Willenberg stood for some time fixed to the spot, while a storm of passion was contending in his bosom against his better reason. What but the most alarming meaning was to be attached to the latter words !

“ Come

"Come along, signor," cried Lodovico, roughly, "let me show you to your chamber at once; if you are so foolish as to refuse your supper, curse me if there is any reason why you should keep me from mine!"

"I wish not to do so, therefore you may go to it as soon as you please; I repeat, I prefer remaining here; this couch shall be my bed to-night."

"But the count says it *shall not!*" insisted the flippant and impudent domestic, grown bolder by having witnessed Ferdinand's conduct to him; "and, besides that, you know beggars must not be choosers."

"Wretch!" said the almost infuriated Theodore, "is it because your master would, coward-like, assail an individual so completely in his power, and that of his minions, that your tongue dares to give vent to the venom of your black heart, in language such as this? Repeat it, and on  
the

the instant shall this arm strike you to the ground."

Awed and confounded by the unexpected threat, a threat which he doubted not would be put into execution, he ventured not a reply. Like all other swaggering dastards, easily put down, a look terrified him, and he slunk over to where a lamp stood, on a mutilated table; and taking it in his hand, he asked, in a submissive and respectful tone—"Is it your pleasure, signor, to go to bed? I am ready to attend you."

A look of silent contempt, and a motion of his arm, was the only affirmative he deigned him; and deeming it better to make no further opposition, he followed him the whole way, in the same unbroken silence.

From the hall they proceeded through a succession of low-roofed passages, through which the wind howled dismally, and  
which

which terminated in a descent of broken steps. The scene without was indeed a dreary one—the storm had quite subsided—the wind, that but a few minutes before seemed to rock the very ground on which they stood, was now no longer heard, and nature had sunk into a calm, so awful and profound, that it almost seemed to De Willenberg as if the whole world, except himself and his ruthless attendant, was laid in eternal silence. The entire face of the sky was cheerless and watery, and the pale moon, as she languidly floated along, looked sickly and drooping, as if exhausted by the fatigue of bearing up so long against the boisterous elements around her, and the rain that had washed away her radiant beauties.

The most prominent objects in front were the remains of an ancient chapel and burial-grounds, beyond which stood the turret; the path leading to it wound amongst innumerable moss-covered graves,  
and

and mouldering relics, that had formerly decorated the chancel, were now lying in many places in heaps of ruins.

The Gothic grandeur of days long past still appeared through the air of desolation, and the awful hue of death and oblivion, in which every object was now clad; time had, on every side, left scattered traces of its destructive course, and even the massy walls of the turret seemed tottering through the tendrils of ivy that crept thickly round it, from its base to the tops of the battlements, the closely-interwoven foliage of which afforded shelter to the bat and owl, whose ominous shrieks were loudly reverberated through the spacious interior.

Suddenly he stopped, for though his understanding was comprehensive, and his mind infinitely superior to the vulgarisms of superstition, he was far from being a sceptic, nor could he remain unconvinced,

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against

against all the alarming occurrences of the evening, or the awful and ill-boding aspect of the scene now before him.

His busy imagination, at that moment, conjured up a thousand dreadful images, horrible and appalling to the eye of mortal; he fancied he saw the murderer's steel glittering in the moonbeams, lifted against his life! and as the terrible idea took possession of him, his features assumed a frightful wildness, his cheeks grew deadly pale, while fire gleamed from his eyes—he caught the arm of the trembling Lodovico, with a violence that gave a sudden shock to his whole frame. The look he fixed on him was like the basilisk's fatal gaze, and the terrified coward shrunk before it, into all his natural insignificance.

“This,” thought Theodore, to himself, “this is a murderer's vile minion! this is the hireling wretch would lead me to my doom,

doom, and afterwards glut his avaricious passions on luxuries and on gold, as the price of my blood! Could I not now, in one moment, annihilate a being so unimportant, so hateful? cut him off, 'with all his imperfections on his head,' and end my fears at once?"

A sort of desperate frenzy seized him, and innumerable impossibilities rushed upon his brain; he would have fled, he knew not how or whither—conquered every obstacle—escaped through rocks, mountains, and seas—done every thing that Omnipotence alone could accomplish; but the fit was transient; had it continued long, he would probably have followed the first suggestion, and rid himself of one so easily removed as Lodovico.

He soon became calm; his features gradually reassumed their natural expression; he dropped the arm he had held, in silence,

lence, and pointing towards the turret, he motioned to his conductor to proceed.

With hurried steps the latter went on, fearful that he would execute the dreadful thought which his countenance had indicated.

Again De Willenberg stopped, and seated himself upon one of the tombs in the chancel, under an arch of a long terrace-walk of wood, that appeared to have formerly connected the turret with the inhabited part of the castle; but it was now so shattered in several places, and so overgrown with briars and weeds, from the adjoining walls, that it was totally impassable.

All around him presented fit subjects for meditation; the pale light of the moon gave an unusual solemnity to this abode of death. Jessamines and wild flowers grew in  
in

in profusion, and hung their sweet-scented blossoms over the sanctified graves, where many a hero lay in everlasting sleep, as if to adorn the spot where their mouldering relics reposed. A few letters, here and there, were visible on some of the dilapidated monuments, from which he endeavoured to trace the names of the departed; but the characters were of ancient date, and in most places quite illegible.

Absorbed in pious reflections, he remained for some time abstracted from his own situation, and unmindful of the effects of the damp atmosphere, until recalled by Lodovico, who, returning towards him, entreated, in a voice of anxious solicitude, that he would no longer imprudently expose himself to cold, by remaining seated amongst the wet grass and weeds that waved about his legs.—“I am sure, signor,” continued he, “there can be nothing so very pleasant in sitting in a

cold churchyard, on such a night as this, amongst graves, and old walls, and tombstones, when you have got any sort of a roof to put your head under; and besides that, if we delay so, my lord will be in one of his usual moods with me, and I shall get no supper."

Aware that it *was* imprudent, and seeing that he must at all hazards endeavour to pass the night in the turret, he went on. Lodovico carried a small lamp, that merely served to guide them to a long passage, leading to a flight of steps, which they ascended, and at the bottom of which a trap-door was level with the earth, covering the entrance to an immense vault. The staircase was a spiral one, and in several places broken and dangerous; it led up to a spacious gallery, corresponding in every respect with all the other parts of this ancient building, and still retaining numerous vestiges of its former magnificence; it was hung down the whole length  
with

with tapestry and faded portraits; and at the further end was the apartment allotted to De Willenberg, which he entered without any symptom of fear; nor did he perceive that Lodovico was gone, until he found himself seated in an old-fashioned armchair, beside a fire of wood, in a large decayed and uncomfortable room, whose dreary aspect promised no diminution of any thing he had to apprehend.

The glare reflected by the dull blaze on the hearth served to shew the antique paintings and hangings that had once adorned the now damp and mouldering walls; and as the light at intervals grew dim, and then burst into a clear flame, the tall martial figures, with their massy helmets and plumes of black, appeared, to his heated fancy, to move in all directions round the room, and sometimes to beckon him towards the obscurity into which they vanished.

In a dark corner stood a mutilated bedstead, covered with old embossed tapestry, and otherwise miserably furnished with a few of the usual appendages; he almost expected every moment to behold the grim form of some midnight assassin emerge from behind the dusky hangings, or the bleeding spectre of some murdered hero, whom this noble edifice had once proudly owned as its lord.

As he continued to view these gloomy and awe-inspiring objects, the mysterious voice he had heard in the hall again recurred to him, forcibly shewing all the horrors of his situation; he was now in the very chamber, where, remembering the appalling words—"Many a brave fellow had slept, to wake no more," and in that very bed, perhaps, before him. Over this room there hung some dire fatality. What scenes of butchery and bloodshed might not its dark and massy walls have concealed! What tortures, what sufferings, might  
not

not these crested warriors have witnessed here!

Again growing faint at the sickening nature of his thoughts, he put up his handkerchief, to wipe away the moisture from his brow, and approaching the lattice, he opened it, to admit a current of air; at the same moment a loud burst of laughter and merriment was resounded from a remote wing of the castle, the boisterous revelry of the chief and his profligate associates. Disgusted by the discordant peal, he hastily closed the lattice, and a breeze of wind, that swept through the apartment, turning the door on its rusty hinges, it shut suddenly, with a terrifying noise, that was reverberated through the whole turret. He was now much more alarmed than ever, for it closed by a spring-lock, that could only be pushed back by a person outside; and whatever dangers might here threaten him, he saw that it was totally impossible to escape from them.

The fire was by this time nearly all consumed, and the expiring embers threw an intermingled light and shade a few paces around them; the other parts of the room were lost in darkness, except when at intervals the swiftly-passing clouds that veiled the sky, allowed a momentary ray of moonshine to shew partially the dismal objects towards which his eyes were directed. In vain he exerted all the scope of memory to recognize the masked stranger, who had apparently felt so great an interest for him; and he tried for a while to cheer himself with a hope of his assistance; but vain, alas! was that hope. Nobody came! Not a human voice—not a footstep—not the breath of mortal, was distinguishable in that untenanted part of the castle.

A drowsy languor had for the last half-hour been gradually stealing over him, and he felt as if it was benumbing all his faculties; his perceptions were certainly becoming

coming less clear, and his sense of danger every moment less and less acute, as if under the incipient effects of a powerful soporific. Unable to overcome it, he determined to lie down, and approached the bed with firmness and resolution, notwithstanding the terrible mystery connected with it.

With a steady hand he drew aside the curtains; nothing within them was visible but the bedclothes. He spoke, and heard only his voice and its dismal echo in return; and recommending himself to the protection of Heaven, he threw aside his outside cloak, and turned down part of the dark rug that served as a coverlid, in order to stretch himself beneath it, which he was just about to do, when the sight of a long streak of blood, that stained the sheet, startled him with almost Galvanic power, and for a while again brought back his fleeting senses.

L 6

Suddenly

Suddenly his hand grew cold; he dropped the curtain, and retreated a few paces from the shocking sight; he flew to the door, but all his exertions to force it open were unavailing; and he was at last compelled to desist, by the frightful noises it sent through the gallery.

He once more opened the lattice, but a strong grating of iron outside forbade a hope of being able to escape that way; and with a quickly-palpitating heart, he again threw himself on the chair he had quitted, to consider if there were any possible means of delivering himself from this death-boding apartment. None, however, could he perceive.

Again he recollected the dreadful and prophetic words he had heard in the hall, and he fancied that he now heard them repeated in the same horrifying tones—  
“In this bed many a one had slept to wake no more!”—“Gracious Providence!  
can

can such a doom really await me?" he ejaculated. "Shall I venture to stretch myself, where soon I might be numbered with those hapless victims of rapine and assassination? Yet wherefore," thought he, "wherefore should they take away *my* life? By my death they can gain nothing—no booty will reward them for the sanguinary deed. *My* death, therefore, can surely only serve to gratify a spirit that gluts itself on murder and on human blood. But such spirits are here to be found amongst this horde of ruthless and abandoned villains;" and in the consciousness of this, the demoniac form of Pierre, in fancy, stood before him, his soul-harrowing and blasphemous expressions still sounding in the atmosphere he contaminated.

Trembling at the recollection of this wretch's fate, De Willenberg joined a prayer for forgiveness to him with those for his own safety; for every thing, and more

more especially the appellation of "chief," by which the others spoke of Ferdinand, now plainly convinced him that he was in the power of a murderous troop of banditti.

His mind had hitherto disclaimed every thing bordering on superstition; but he now could not help admitting the possibility of a Superior Power being commissioned to warn the innocent from the machinations of the wicked.

Growing every moment more sleepy, he had not the power of reflecting further upon his situation, or bethinking that this unusual drowsiness was probably owing to the portion he had drank of the wine presented to him in the hall by Lodovico, and which, fortunately for him, Jacintha had dashed from him, in time to prevent his drinking the whole of it.

The same inclination to sleep had now  
returned;

returned; he could resist its influence no longer, and in spite of all that was to be feared, he again sought the bed. Ere he reached it, his eyes were nearly closed; the drowsiness became unconquerable, and aspirating a short but fervent prayer, he lay down.

He was quickly buried in a profound sleep, in which state he had been about two hours, when a terrific dream startled him, and he almost awoke. An uneasy slumber however succeeded, disturbed by horrible imaginings, until he felt, or fancied he felt, as if the whole bed was in motion.

In less than the space of a minute all doubt was changed to certainty; a large trap-door underneath slowly receded, and ere he was sufficiently roused to spring from the hideous gulf that yawned to receive him, he was lowered, bed and all, into a deep and spacious vault, one of death's

death's blackest, gloomiest caverns, into which the light of the sun had never penetrated.

CHAP.

CHAPTER VIII.  
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But that I am forbid,
I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul. SHAKESPEARE.

FORTUNATELY for De Willenberg, his presence of mind was at all times equal to his courage, though such a shock might have benumbed the courage and powers of the most intrepid. On either side of him stood two men, of a diabolical appearance, each holding in one hand a lighted torch, and in the other an unsheathed dagger. Their meteor eyes glared horribly as they bent over him, ready to strike his deathblow; yet in De Willenberg's countenance, now animated with the heroic bravery and resolution that nerved his whole frame, there was something

thing that seemed to awe them from their sanguinary purpose.

“Strike, villains, strike!” roared a tall figure, wrapped in a long black cloak, that covered him from head to foot, and his features concealed by a mask; “instantly do your duty, and plunge your daggers to the very hilts in his deepest blood. Strike, or, by Heaven, ye die yourselves!” at the same time forcibly detaining Theodore, who had started from the bed towards an opposite door, that stood half open, and which the glare of the torches enabled him to distinguish.

“Murderous hell-hounds, avaunt!” cried the enraged De Willenberg, bursting from his grasp with a violence that would have defied the strength of a Sampson. “Advance but one step nearer, and this moment is your last,” he continued, quickly snatching the glittering instrument of death from the hand of one of the ruffians.

“Give *me* a dagger!” exclaimed the
one

one who had held him, seeing them hesitate in alarm at his resolute attitude; "I will do it myself. I fear no man."

"Vile, abandoned miscreant, wilt thou not fear the man who can this instant send thee into thy Maker's awful presence, amidst all thy foul and damning enormities?" said Theodore, turning upon him at the moment, and seizing him with strength almost superhuman, while he raised the dagger towards his breast—"Monster! wilt thou not tremble at the deed I could now do—at the fate to which I could now hurl thee? Oh, to what a depth of everlasting torture could this steel sink thy recreant soul!"

"Then may we sink together!" vociferated the other, making a thrust at his bosom, which fortunately Theodore was sufficiently on his guard to foil. The mask his antagonist wore at the same time dropped off, and discovered count Ferdinand, the chief of this lawless clan of assassins.

"Wretch! I thought as much," said
De

De Willenberg, contemptuously trampling the mask beneath his feet. "You need not have put on this disguise, for a villain can be recognized under *any* mask."

"Hell and furies! is this language for *me* to hear?" cried the ferocious bandit. "Be the words your last in this world!"

Outrageous at the failure of his first blow, he lost all command of himself, and foaming with fury, he made a second aim unsuccessfully, when Theodore, aware that self-preservation is one of nature's most imperative laws, acting on the defensive, felled him, with a deadly blow, to the earth. Ferdinand once more sprang on his feet, and renewed the attack; desperate nearly to madness with pain, his random blows were aimed in every direction; at length burying his dagger in the heart of one of the others who had ventured to his assistance, with a hideous groan he dropped lifeless on the ground, and on his bleeding corpse fell that of his associate.

Enraged

Enraged at the death of their chief, the three remaining banditti rushed forward, and closed upon De Willenberg, who still fought with the same undaunted vigour, and for a while effectually parried off their blows. One in particular, more determined on vengeance than the others, snatching up a sabre, aimed it at his heart, but missed; and Theodore, with all his force, dashed him several paces from him.

Deadly pale, and trembling with fury, the ruffian again rushed towards him, directing at the same time a stroke that threatened certain destruction; another moment would have been his last, and the murderer's steel plunged in his side, had not a miracle interposed to save him. Just at that critical instant, a loud cry was heard outside of—"Fire! fire! the castle is in flames!" and almost breathless with consternation, the masked stranger rushed in, and threw himself between De Willenberg and his furious assailants.

The

The present was not a time for inquiry, on the part of Theodore, as to the quick recovery of this extraordinary man—"Fly!" exclaimed the latter, waving off the combatants—"fly hence, while to save your lives is still in your power! a minute's delay, and ye are lost for ever! A flash of lightning struck one of the turrets, the blazes reach the sky, and in less than the space of half-an-hour, the entire building will be inevitably consumed!"

"The devil take the one who brings such news!" roared they, hastily flinging down their daggers, and rushing impetuously towards the door, to effect their escape, regardless now of their dead commander, or the flight of him who had slain him, when their own precious lives were in such imminent peril.

De Willenberg was nearly exhausted by his exertions, and he leaned against the wall to recover breath, directing an eloquent look of gratitude to his preserver,
who

who conjured him, if he valued his life, to quit immediately the fatal spot.—“ You too will fly with me, my friend. Yet ere we go, tell me, I pray you, to whom I am indebted for my life. You surely are not leagued with these atrocious and unnatural savages?”

“ I have never yet shed human blood, signor, nor ever will, but in my own defence. Rest assured that I am your friend; but at present seek to know no more of me. I have saved your life, and all I ask of you in return is this—let none know that I have done so. When you have got in safety beyond the confines of this terrible place, be your destination where it may, betray not that any one here has dared to be your friend, or your liberator; if you do, *my* life will be the forfeit.”

“ Betray you, my noble, generous protector! never! sooner would I——”

“ Nay, signor, the moments are precious, and we are in the midst of danger; let us instantly hence; I will conduct you beyond

yond these walls—there, a few words more, and we part, perhaps for ever. Now follow me.”

In silence he pursued the steps of his guide through several long and intricate passages, whose naturally-unwholesome atmosphere, and an infectious moisture that trickled down the walls, were rendered still more intolerable by a cloud of smoke that was rapidly spreading itself through the whole interior of the building, and announcing the quick approach of the flames in that direction. Ascending another staircase, they discovered, by the aid of a torch, a concealed door, which opening by touching a spring, admitted them into the hall by which they had first entered the castle. It was now completely illuminated, by the immensity of the clear blaze without shining through the casements. Almost the whole of an adjoining suite of rooms were enveloped in flames, which spread with unconquerable violence

lence and rapidity. The total destruction by fire of this extensive and formerly-magnificent pile was a truly-awful sight; yet there was such a sublimity and grandeur in the picture, that horror, admiration, and awe, were mingled in the mind of the spectator.

“ Good God !” exclaimed De Willenberg, shuddering at the thought, “ should any of these unhappy wretches not have been alarmed, they must inevitably perish ! Shall we not warn them from a fate so shocking ?” Saying this, he was rushing up the staircase that would have led him into the body of the fire.

“ Holy father ! whither are you going, senor ?” cried the mask, running after him, and forcibly pulling him back. “ Do not you see that our own safety entirely depends upon instant flight ? Come, come away ; trust me they will look to themselves, and not one of them will for an instant think about you.”

Had it not been for the interference of this man, De Willenberg's humanity would have led him to his own destruction. He had hardly got clear of the last step, when a side-door flew back, and the devouring element swept in a moment through almost the whole extent of the hall, as if eager to annihilate them for having dared its power so long. Their lives hung upon the moment, and they had merely time to retreat into the long passage communicating with the forest, whither they were followed by Jacintha, who had, in a moment of desperation, darted across from an opposite apartment, as the only way of preserving herself, and in doing so had been severely scorched.

An exclamation of mutual joy at each other's safety burst from the mask and Jacintha. They had moved but a few paces onwards, when, with a tremendous crash, that was loudly reverberated through the air, part of the roof fell in, and buried beneath

neath it all the faded grandeur of this stately edifice.

The shock had so overpowered, and the smoke and heat so nearly suffocated them, that they were directly unable to speak, until they found themselves once more in the open air; and then, by way of compensating herself, Jacintha's tongue began, with its accustomed volubility, to reiterate, and wherever she could, to magnify, the dangers they had escaped.—“ Lord-a-mercy!” cried she, devoutly making the sign of the cross between her prominent forehead and chin, “ I never got such a fright in all my born days, that I am sure and certain I did not—at least since the night old Hiego, my second husband, died. God rest his soul! he was an honest, hard-working man, and a comely one too, as a body may say, when I married him. Jesu! what a fire! It is a judgment upon the whole vile set of them for their terrible crimes, that is certain. See how it rages!”

M 2

“ And

“And it is equally certain,” said the mask, “that if we stay here much longer, some judgment will fall upon *us*.”

They had been all this time waiting the slow return of the little boat, which had been rowed to the opposite bank by some of the banditti in their escape, who having omitted to fasten it there, the current was gradually bearing it back, and it was now within reach.

“Come, signor,” said his conductor, hauling it over, “let the three of us get in, and we will steer ourselves to the other side, and then, with your permission, I will bring you safely through the forest.”

“Ay, safely out of this den of villainy,” added Jacintha, who was stepping first into the boat, and drawing back one foot, in order to stop a while to vent the execrations with which her heart was full.—“Oh, the wretches! they will all be in a larger fire than this yet.”

But

But her masked friend very prudently, and *sans cérémonie*, urged her gently onwards, to her no little discomfiture at that moment; and De Willenberg entering the vessel after them, they were quickly wafted across the stream.

The obstacles that had retarded their ingress were now far less numerous. The banditti, in their hasty flight, had forgotten to replace either bars, bolts, or chains, so that though the mask was evidently not well acquainted with the intricacies through which they had to pass, he was enabled, by dint of perseverance, to fulfil his promise of guiding them safely out of the forest.—Having got beyond the borders of it, he stopped.—“Here, signor,” said he, turning to De Willenberg—“here we must separate. That is your road,” pointing out the direction of his mother’s house; “this, to the left, is ours, for Jacintha and I go together—our destination is the same. At present you behold me enveloped in
..... M 3 mystery,

mystery, which I dare not lay open to you. My voice you know not, and it is well, for I must not be recognized. This must account for my concealing my features beneath a mask, which, if removed, you would know those features instantly. On strict secrecy now *my* very existence depends; therefore be you silent as the grave, as to the means by which you were saved from intended death, and the man who ventured to promote your escape. Be guarded, and watchful of yourself, that you betray me not to any body—to the officers of your regiment most particularly.”

“ Can it be possible that you are——”

“ Nay, signor, start not, nor thus interrupt me; I am not whom you take me for. When you rejoin your regiment (for well, you perceive, I know you), it will be necessary to relate some of the transactions of this night. Tell them of your venturing into the forest—your meeting and being led by the banditti to their secret abode—your rencontre with them in the
vault

vault—the final triumph of your bravery—of the conflagration that has happened—that you seized the moment of general confusion and dismay for your escape; and lastly, that you believe every other individual to have perished in the flames. Now, signor, farewell! Yet one more charge, and I have done. You would fain know who is your enemy, and who the one that preserved you from his foul machinations. This is not now necessary, and it is a knowledge I should wish you never to possess; yet lest circumstances should ever render it essential to your safety, or lest your *life* should ever be again assailed, take this packet,” drawing one from his bosom as he spoke; “preserve it carefully from every mortal eye—its contents even from *your own* for ever, should nought of what I have suggested occur; let no idle or common curiosity ever tempt you to open it. But if at any time you *are* unfortunately obliged to do so, then will every mystery that now hangs over it and me

be revealed, and your treacherous, perhaps unsuspected enemy, stand exposed to public view and public infamy. Now then, signor, a last farewell." He attempted to go.

"By Heaven we must not part so!" said Theodore, detaining him. "My kind, disinterested, generous deliverer, at least accept this (drawing forth his purse), as a trifling proof of my gratitude, or rather of the gratitude I fain would evince, but cannot; but the time yet may come when I *can* prove it; tell me then, I entreat, whither go ye?"

"No, senor, I cannot—will not receive it," said the other, resolutely but respectfully pushing it from him; "for the little service I have performed, your thanks prove your gratitude, and my reward. You term that service disinterested; would it be such, were I to accept remuneration? Certainly not; therefore put it up, and be assured I thank you just as much as if I took it."

"May I then not know your destination?"

tion? may I not hope to see you again, and unmasked?"

"Where I go, senor, is far, far distant, and pardon me if I decline informing you; but of this rest satisfied—if at any future time it shall be necessary to recur to this dreadful night, and my evidence be required, I shall hear of it, and coming face to face, will proclaim aloud the guilty."

"I will not urge you farther," said De Willenberg, with an affectionate pressure of the hand. "May we meet again under happier circumstances: farewell! farewell!"

"Adieu, senor!" replied the other, returning the pressure; "would that it were not necessary for us to part here, or that we could depart more comfortably! But see—the moon itself grows clearer, as if to light you towards your home, and us upon our wearisome journey; once more farewell!"

"Farewell, senor," added Jacintha, dropping a profound curtsy; "the mother St. Agnes, and all the saints in the
M 5 calendar,

calendar, keep you from ever entering this vile forest again !”

Almost in the next instant they were gone, and De Willenberg stood for some time leaning against a tree, bewildered with the confusion of his ideas. The events of the night seemed as a frightful dream; the impression they left on his senses was a sort of stupifying horror; and as if but half awake, he doubted for a while whether such things had really been. On coming to himself, however, he could doubt no longer, for he held in his hand one of the evidences of it—the packet, which he would have given worlds to be permitted to open; but recollecting the strict injunction he had received with it, the promise he had pledged, and how dishonourable, how culpable, and perhaps dangerous, it would be to violate that promise, he resisted the temptation, and placed it securely in the bosom of his vest, and then slowly bent his steps homewards, intending

intending to return to Zersk at the expiration of three days, to see what would be the issue of the anonymous letter he had received on the foregoing evening. He deemed it prudent not to mention to his mother any part of what had occurred to him at the bandit's castle, lest its alarming her with the idea of treachery being on foot against him, she should strenuously oppose his going back, or in any way investigating the matter farther.

A few scattered stars that had glimmered in the horizon were now gradually disappearing, and another morning of anxiety and suspense tediously dawning upon him. The time crept slowly and heavily on—his impatience made every succeeding moment appear more tardy in its course, for he wished not to arrive at home at an unseasonable hour, lest his mother's interrogatories should lead him to betray unguardedly the horrors and perils he had been exposed to; he therefore the less re-

M 6

gretted

gretted the loss of his horse, as he could now pursue his way more leisurely, and he could also easily account for his returning without it by saying, what would be literally true, that he having taken shelter from the storm, the animal had become suddenly terrified and unmanageable, and had eventually broken away from him.

A smart breeze now swept round him, and as he advanced, the murmuring of a distant waterfall broke slowly on the stillness of the morning, growing louder and louder as each step brought him nearer to it. His limbs yet ached severely after his fall, but he proceeded on with a firm and unrelaxed step, and wishing to prolong his walk, so as to retard his arrival at home, he turned on a path that wound up the side of an immense chain of towering and gigantic rocks, the highest of which overtopped the tallest trees, and commanded a far-distant view of the Baltic and its magnificent shores.

The

The scene immediately surrounding him was awfully grand and picturesque. On one side was heard the cascade's thundering din; the alternately black and foaming element was now lost in the immense obscurity through which it flowed, and again reappeared in all its native terrors; on another hung tremendous cliffs, which almost seemed to threaten instant destruction to the extensive woods that reared their dark heads beneath them. Loudly-roaring volumes of water dashed awfully, with resistless force, through the frightful chasms below, and broke on the astonished senses, according to the ascent or descent that its hearer made. Here and there, between the rocks, a few groups of trees in full verdure relieved the wandering eye; then descending a gentle declivity, a more congenial prospect presented itself.

The whole vegetable world seemed revived by the late rain, and the glorious
luminary

luminary of day at length reappearing in the yellow-streaked eastern hemisphere, threw its gladdening radiance over the beautiful landscape; the sky was perfectly serene, and the lower air was filled with the delicious perfume of the most odoriferous plants, which flourished there spontaneously; the sweet-scented clematis, the oleander, and the agnus castus, in full bearing, threw their fragrance around, and their beautifully-varied colours feasted the eye; the richest treasures of Nature there flowed forth luxuriantly; the trees in splendid array of glittering green and gold; the silvery course of the waterfall, gliding in majesty sublime from the mountainous precipices through the fertile glens—all contributed to animate De Willenberg with a full sense of the wisdom, the prescience, and the glory of the Omnipotent Being who was the author of those noble and wonderful works.

All his thoughts ascended in pious fervour

your and gratitude to Heaven for its watchful care and protection of him through the perils of the preceding night, and sinking upon his knees on the verdant spot, he poured forth his usual morning thanksgiving to the Deity, with all the sincerity of a heart that really felt and acknowledged the magnitude of the divine favour.

He remembered, too, with the gratitude they deserved, the services of his mysterious deliverer; the more he thought of him, the more his desire to penetrate the secrecy in which he had wrapt himself increased. He was evidently some person perfectly acquainted with him, and it could not have been chance alone that had thrown him in his way at such a time, though it was equally evident that either he had never been one of the banditti, or was one contrary to the intentions of Nature and his own inclinations. He was confident that he had never before seen
Jacintha,

Jacintha, and her being the friend or relative of this stranger surprised and perplexed him still more. At one moment he censured himself for not employing even stratagem to discover whither he was going; but then again there appeared in doing so something so ignoble—so unworthy and degrading, that he very soon became contented to remain in ignorance of him, until some event (which certainly was not to be wished for) might take place to render his presence necessary, and in such case he had solemnly promised to come forward and declare himself.

His reflections gradually became of a more melancholy cast, for they turned upon the death of his father, and that father's dying malediction. His very soul sickened within him at the horrid idea of his having impiously denounced a curse upon him, even at the solemn moment in which he was about to enter the awful presence of his Creator.—“ Oh, God! oh! good

good and gracious God, forgive him!" he ejaculated, clasping his hands together, in agony so acute that he had nearly fallen to the earth, "forgive him! and wash away too *my* offences, for I have erred towards him; yet surely—surely I deserved not so unnatural a bequest."

It was indeed unnatural, and equally so, that Theodore should have longer seriously lamented the loss of one whose injustice, illiberality, and unkindness, rendered him so unworthy of the affection that an amiable and dutiful son should ever feel for a tender and exemplary parent. He experienced the same emotions that we all feel on hearing of the death of a fellow-creature, but scarcely more.

Thus meditating, he had travelled several miles ere he was aware that his walk was nearly terminated; and he almost regretted when, descending into the little plantation that shaded his mother's house, he

he entirely lost sight of the vast and stupendous objects that had for a while kept painful remembrances from his mind.

Madame de Willenberg had sat down to her early and wholesome repast of cakes, jelly, and milk, when he entered. Joy at seeing his mother, whom but a few hours before he had despaired of ever again beholding, gave to his cheeks a fine flush, that looked like the roseate glow of health, animating his handsome and manly countenance with a thousand fresh beauties.—“Thanks to the Virgin you are returned in safety, my sweet boy!” exclaimed she, eagerly starting from her seat to embrace him. “Theodore, my love, how have you arranged the business on which you went? I trust it is all happily at an end?”

He was incapable of uttering a direct untruth, and therefore, without prevaricating, he replied—“I have commenced the investigation which such an affair requires,

quires, and which cannot, of course, be accomplished without delay; in three days more it will be decided."

Wishing to avoid further interrogation on the subject, he retired to his own room immediately after breakfast, and threw himself on the bed. He was really in need of rest, from the dreadful bodily and mental sufferings he had so lately undergone. His fall was productive of severe pain, but he felt that he could hardly be sufficiently thankful to Providence, that its consequences were not more serious. He had not long lain down when a profound and refreshing sleep came on, which lasted several hours, and the salutary effects of which were visible when he arose. He was surprised to find that it was so late; and though the usual hour for dinner was long past, his mother was still waiting for him. She had a multiplicity of questions to ask, and alarm was visible in her words and on her features, for she had

had only a little before been informed of his having returned from Zersk without his horse. This circumstance, together with his unexpectedly-quick return, made her fancy a thousand absurdities, which, to her fears, appeared quite probable, and, amongst the rest, that he had actually detected the author of the letter, engaged him in single combat, with all a young and proud-spirited-hero's impetuosity, and in the contest had had his horse slain under him.

On this point she had, however, happily deceived herself; yet even when assured that she had, her mind was still far from being set at rest, and she continued to interrogate him as to all that he had said, and all he had discovered relative to the letter.

It was his intention to proceed on the ensuing day to Herman Castle, and he wished to persuade himself that it was almost solely with the view of being removed

moved from these distressing inquiries ; but Love softly whispered to him, that to be a single hour absent from the society of Victoria, was infinitely more distressing than would have been such interrogatories, had she continued them for a month. Away from her, he found that tranquillity or happiness was not to be experienced, and to his happiness her presence was essential—" Yet what is it I would do ?" he asked himself ; " surely to indulge longer in her fascinating society is now forbidden me, and would be destructive to my future peace, if such I can ever know in this world again without her. Their arms are open to me, it is true ; and even poor and portionless as I now am, still am I welcome as ever to them—still would they exalt me to the blissful station they proposed—still would the count make me his son—Victoria her husband. Oh ! felicity on earth unparalleled ! But no, no ; it must not be ; honour on my part interdicts it. I will go back to the castle, but

but for no selfish gratification—I will state all that has occurred, shew myself in all my confirmed poverty—release the count from every promise, and, with fortitude and philosophy, I will tell Victoria that we can never be united.”

His heart was almost bursting with anguish as he formed this resolution, and tears nearly forced themselves from his eyes; but there was something delightful in the idea of even seeing her again, and cheered by it, there was nothing particular in his manner, when he told his mother that he was about to revisit the castle; he had not mentioned to her the clandestine manner in which he left it, nor his letter to the count; and, in truth, he felt no little embarrassment in thus constraining himself to encounter all the inquiries, and quell all the apprehensions such a letter would have excited, and he now regretted his having written it.

Early

Early next day he took leave of his mother, and was soon again on the road to the castle. It was a road which he had always travelled with feelings of pleasure, from its rich and romantic beauties; but it appeared now to his eyes vastly more beautiful than ever, for it was leading him from misery to happiness—to the society of the woman he loved.

Riding along, at a smart gallop, he had got about half-way, when he heard indistinctly several voices at a distance, and the trampling of horses, evidently advancing towards him. Turning an angle, formed by a thick wood that skirted the road, he met one of the horsemen, who had considerably distanced the rest, and who was riding pensively along, his head bent upon his bosom. The man suddenly looked up through tears that were glistening in his eyes, and Theodore beheld, not a stranger, as he had expected, but his own servant Conrad.

If

If De Willenberg was surprised at meeting him thus, what shall we say of Conrad at the moment he recognized his master, alive and standing before him! His lips—his tongue—his eyes—every feature of his distorted face, spoke astonishment and incredulity; and obeying the impulse of its terrified rider, the animal, at a sudden check of the reins, reared on its hinder legs, and retreated backwards several paces.

“Conrad, do you not know me, or whom do you take me for?” asked De Willenberg, smiling at the extraordinary expression of his countenance, and wondering what all this was owing to—“Do you not know me?” he repeated.

“Y—yes,” stammered Conrad, at last making the sign of the cross, and then wiping his eyes, as if to see more clearly, “my master!” he exclaimed—“my dear master! Blessed Virgin! you are not killed then—nobody murdered you!”

“No,

“No, indeed, Conrad,” replied De Wil-
lenberg, smiling again at his honest sim-
plicity, and still more surprised at his
having gained information of the perils he
had escaped. “But wherefore do you ask
the question? How did you hear of my
danger?”

Conrad was now thoroughly convinced
that he spoke to an inhabitant of this
world, and he no longer feared to approach
him. He would instantly have alighted
and thrown himself at his beloved master’s
feet, but the latter prevented him, bidding
him explain the cause of his interrogatory.
—“I will, senor; but not for worlds would
I that we should be overheard by another;
so if you will just come a little way into
the wood here with me, I will tell you the
whole story, and plenty I have to tell you
too, I warrant.”

“No bad or unwelcome tidings, I
trust?” asked Theodore, half alarmed at
his ambiguous manner, and riding with
him into one of the recesses of the wood.

Surprise and joy at thus unexpectedly and suddenly finding his master alive, had, for a while, driven every other object out of his head; and amongst the rest, he had totally forgotten the whole train of vassals that were accompanying him to the forest: leaving them now to pursue their journey thither, without any assistance or advice from him, he related to the astonished De Willenberg the current report of his having been assassinated in the forest, the inconsolable grief of Victoria on hearing it, and her subsequent flight from the castle in consequence of it.

When he spoke of her having fled, De Willenberg had nearly fallen from his horse, which would have happened, had not Conrad instantly assured him that he knew where she was, and promised to conduct him to the very door of her retreat. —“Where is she?” he impatiently demanded—“Where is my Victoria?—Tell me, that on Love’s swiftest pinions I may fly

fly to assure her that never, never was she so ardently beloved by me as she now is.—Let us begone—lead on without delay!”

“Nay, my honoured master, such impetuosity would mar your wishes. Hear me a moment further. We must act with prudence. None now in the castle, except her maid Barbara, know whither she is gone, and *she* only under a strict injunction to secrecy; but determined to obtain the secret, I wheedled her a while, and, woman-like, she told it.”

“I beseech you, Conrad, keep me not longer in suspense—tell me at once where she is?”

“In the convent of St. Agnes, senor.”

“Merciful Heaven! the convent of St. Agnes! And has the meek, the gentle, the lovely Victoria, enclosed herself in such a den of horrors as that convent is?—Has she, in the wildness of her grief, sought a sanctuary beneath the same roof with the wicked, unfeeling abbess Stephania, whose

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character

character the whole country is acquainted with?—Did she, young, beautiful, rich, and accomplished, fly the world and all its allurements, to spend her days in such a place, under tyranny, cruelty, and oppression?—All this did she do for me. Talk not to me now of impetuosity or rashness. Let me hasten to her, I repeat—pour out my gratitude at her feet, and prove myself worthy of her by releasing her—ay, from all the vows that ever bound deluded nuns to Heaven, I will release her!”

“ You forget, senor, that she cannot yet have pledged any serious vow ; she has scarcely yet entered the twelfth hour of her noviciate, so that you cannot have so much difficulty as you suppose in liberating her, unless indeed the lady abbess should absolutely refuse to give her up.”

“ Refuse !” echoed De Willenberg, enraged at his even imagining such a thing. “ Think you, sir, she *dare* refuse? By all the powers above, if she *did*, she should
in

in tears of blood repent it for the remainder of her miserable life!—Come, let us proceed.”

“Softly, senior; you have still more to hear. Lady Victoria wished not to be known at the convent; and to avoid it, she gave her name there as donna Clara de Manzilla. But I see I have offended you, and therefore will not presume to offer my opinion any more.”

“Indeed, my faithful Conrad, you have not offended me; and to prove that you have not, I will be guided by your advice, and act cautiously. I see that to get her away from the monastery, will require a little dissimulation and stratagem, and deep must surely be the stratagem that can deceive the wily, watchful, and suspicious abbess of St. Agnes. But hear how I have planned. Not many days ago, I sat for my portrait to one of the most eminent artists in Warsaw, intending to present it, when finished, to lady Victoria. That portrait I have now in my possession, and

and by means of it she shall know that I am living. I would not hazard the sudden intelligence, lest joy or surprise overpower her; but there is no alternative. She has, you say, assumed another name; I will do so too, and in the character of her brother, don Guzman de Manzilla, send in the miniature, and demand to see her. What think you of my project?"

"That it will succeed," replied the enraptured Conrad. "Holy St. Peter! I thought until now that I had not my equal in Poland for planning and manœuvring; but, Lord! I see I am a mere ninny in comparison with you, senor; and as you have settled so cleverly how you are to regain her ladyship, if you please, we will lose no more time, but set off at once."

He had still hoped that his master would confide to him the mysterious cause of his sudden departure from Herman Castle, but that hope was disappointed; and unwilling to touch upon a chord that would

would vibrate so painfully through De Willenberg's bosom, especially in his present anticipations of happiness with Victoria, he did not venture the remotest inquiry on the subject; but thoughtfully checking his horse's pace, and riding at a respectful distance after him, they took the shortest road through the wood to the convent of St. Agnes.

END OF VOL. II.

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DE WILLENBERG;

OR,

THE TALISMAN.

A TALE OF MYSTERY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY I. M. H. HALES, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF THE ASTROLOGER.

Such is the weakness of all mortal hope,
So fickle is the state of earthly things,
That ere they come into their aimed scope,
They fall so short of our frail reckonings,
And bring us bale and bitter sorrowings,
Instead of comfort, which we should embrace—
This is the state of Cæsars and of Kings.
Let none, therefore, that is in meaner place,
Too greatly grieve at any his unlucky case. SPENSER.

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1821.



DE WILLENBERG.

CHAPTER I.

————— There

Pale Superstition feels th' incessant throb

Of ghastly panic, in whose startl'd ear

The knell still deepens, and the raven croaks.

SMOLLETT.

THE reader is, by this time, no doubt, anxious to visit our heroine in her monastic seclusion, for which purpose we shall set out with her from the rustic cottage of honest Jerome, her guide and protector. Had the grief and poignant anguish of mind she laboured under allowed of any augmentation, it would have been from

VOL. III.

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the novelty of her situation—a fugitive from her home and friends, that home, those friends, it seemed likely she should behold no more.

At that early and unseasonable hour, travelling along a lonely and unfrequented road, with such a companion; and, worst of all, about to bury herself in a monastery, the Monastery of St. Agnes too, the gloomiest, and most rigorous in its laws, and its enforcement of them, in the whole kingdom! the prospect was truly an appalling one; but had it even been much more so, she would now have gone on.

All along from the cottage was a continued scene of luxuriant beauty; rich landscapes, alternately hill and dale, wood and water, met the eye all around; yet *her* eye saw them not, for her thoughts were far from them—they were with De Willenberg.

After

After several ludicrous hems and grimaces, by way of preamble, Jerome ventured to observe, that "such an honour was not conferred upon him every day, as a beautiful young lady, of such great rank, condescending to take a journey along with a poor man like him, and on one of his mules too; and for certain it must be something wondrous and important that made *her* do so."

Victoria saw that curiosity was getting the better of his hitherto-respectful silence, and she was on her guard against saying too much; but as he was to be her convoy to the monastery, she knew that she must necessarily confide the affair in part to him.—"Now hear me, my friend," said she, presenting her purse to him; "once more I enjoin you to secrecy—let this ensure it. Domestic causes, which may not be told to a stranger's ear, force me to leave, for a while, my home, and seek an asylum in the convent to which we are going. None but Barbara and

yourself know my retreat, and none must seek me there. Promise me, therefore, that nothing shall ever tempt you to betray me."

Jerome's countenance was a true picture of honesty and integrity, and a promise once uttered by him was inviolable.—"No, my sweet young lady," he replied, "I would not be the wretch to betray you, were the crown of Poland to be my reward. How then do you think I would have the conscience to take your purse from you? Nay, my lady, don't mistake a poor man's meaning; I cannot take it—indeed I cannot; and sooner than my tongue should betray the confidence of a woman, the one who would make me such a traitor shall pluck it from the root."

These were sentiments that would have done honour to the highest station. Victoria's confidence in him was firm, and she insisted, with a look in which he saw that

that another refusal would offend her, that he would accept the purse as a reward, at least for his trouble, if not for his fidelity; and with a reluctant hand he took it.

A close avenue of oak and larch trees at length brought them to the gates of the convent, immediately within which a large ancient clock was striking six, and the instant it ceased, the dismal peal of the matin-bell succeeded it.

The sombre and uninviting appearance of the whole exterior exactly answered the picture Victoria's fancy had drawn of it. It was enclosed by a square wall, of immense height and thickness, three sides of which were closely shaded and overhung by double rows of beech and larch trees, which almost completely darkened the principal entrance; and the fourth, which extended to the corner of a small village, and which was considerably

ably lower than the others, was, at the wish of the lady abbess, and father Hugo, the confessor, guarded by a sentinel, to prevent the encroach of any impious intruder (for it was said that the wall was quite low enough to be easily scaled), who might possibly be so daring as to venture beyond the hallowed barrier, for the diabolical and unpardonable purpose of seeing a pretty young nun, and also to convince any of the holy sisterhood, whose bosoms might, even in the midst of prayer and fasting, still harbour any of the sinful lusts of the flesh, that at least, if their hearts had not renounced the dear images of men, the men must, of necessity, renounce *them*, and that every chance of communication between them was cut off.

The more effectually to wean those frail daughters of Eve from the other sex, the ones selected for the tantalizing office of sentinel there were usually creatures who
only

only required the loss of an eye each to give them the appearance of Vulcan's workmen—the Cyclopes, or, at all events, a branch of that uncouth-featured family. Their ages were as formidable to every thing like love as their looks; and, in short, the sagacity of the lady abbess in suggesting the plan, was scarcely more commendable than the fidelity and ingenuity of the one who picked them out.

Close to the gate was the handle of the bell, which Jerome having pulled, a short hunch-backed creature presently made her appearance, acting as portress, and stalking out from an adjoining portal. Sharp misery had indeed worn *her* to the bone; her figure was almost a skeleton, and her features were hideously squalid, meagre, and discoloured. As she approached, crossing herself, and mumbling out her Ave-Marias, she raised one of her squinting eyes towards the strangers, and demanded their business. Coming a little nearer,

and espying Jerome through the grating, she uttered a frightful yell. — “ Christ Jesu!” cried she, “ a *man* so near me! Oh, holy mother St. Agnes, let me not behold him!” and she drew a thick veil over her face.

“ Mother St. Belzebub!” exclaimed the offended Jerome, “ I wonder what a man could have to say to *you*, you ugly, raw-boned, withered old witch! Ay, you may well cover your ghostly-looking face from the sight of man!”

“ Holy Virgin defend me!” ejaculated Garcia.

“ Why then you can defend yourself, old Jezebel!” continued Jerome, “ for you are a virgin, as sure as ever an ape was led by an old maid below. You will have one yet in your dragon paws.”

“ Out upon you!” roared the enraged portress, hobbling faster towards him, and raising her crutch, as if to strike him; but Victoria, dreading the effects of such an altercation, besought Jerome to depart,
now

now that she had arrived at her destination in safety.

Bowing with deference to her, after giving her his blessing, and casting a look of ineffable contempt at poor Garcia, he pursued his way to market with his baskets.

“Blessed are the meek-hearted and they who suffer patiently!” said she, when he had got out of her reach, replacing the crutch by her side, and slowly opening the gate to admit Victoria. “Well, daughter,” venturing to draw back her veil, and eyeing her closely from head to foot, “well, daughter, you are come, I suppose, to make another happy member of our holy community? Blessed be St. Agnes!”

“Yes, mother, I *am* come to be a member of it,” sighed Victoria; “but, alas! far, far from being a happy one,” thought she—“that I never can be.”

B. 5

“Ah,

“ Ah, lucky is it for you, child, that you chose the convent of St. Agnes! Give thanks to the Madonna, whose holy spirit inspired you to come here. Your poor soul is saved at once, and on the straight road to heaven now, when it passes thro’ purgatory. God send us all safely through it! Yes, daughter, you are under the same blessed roof with our sweet and glorious lady abbess, Stephania; and if ever there was a saint upon earth, I am sure she is one. Heaven be her portion!”

“ Have the kindness to conduct me at once to the superior,” said Victoria, disgusted with her hypocritical cant.

“ You cannot see her yet then,” returned Garcia, sullenly, huffed at being interrupted; “ she is just now going to matins, and would not see you, nor your betters, at such a time. So you must wait till they are over.”

“ That I am content to do,” said our heroine, with mild dignity, and a look that silenced the insolent menial, who,
having

having shewn her into the abbess's sitting-room, instantly withdrew.

The matin service usually lasted about half an hour, and Victoria employed the interval she had to wait in surveying this strangely-furnished apartment. The walls were painted a dark leaden or stone colour, corresponding with the gloomy grey garments worn by the abbess and sisterhood; every thing in it looked cold, wretched, and cheerless, and completely emblematic of monastic austerity and privation. At one end stood an uncovered altar of black marble, above which was hung a full-length figure of the dying Saviour, in the very colouring and expression of whose features the bigotry of the artist was palpable, so frightfully and unnaturally had he depicted his sufferings.

Victoria was shocked at seeing two or three instruments of self-castigation, and a whip of knotted cords, suspended along

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the

the walls.—“ Oh, superstition, hypocrisy most abominable !” exclaimed she. “ Surely, surely human beings, endued with sense, reason, and the power of reflecting, *cannot*, for an instant, believe that such things are acceptable to the Deity. Can fasting, penance in sackcloth and ashes, scourging, or all their deceitful tears, wash away one single crime, or its consequences, from the conscience they dare to load with it? Monstrous, unnatural supposition, as if we could expiate on earth, in such a way as this, our offences towards Heaven. Yet, alas ! if these be their impious doctrines here, and that they *are*, every thing too plainly tells, what scenes of horror and bigotry must I be a witness to !”

While thus soliloquizing on their follies and their hypocrisy, the door was slowly thrown open, and, with a measured and majestic step, a tall dignified-looking woman, apparently near fifty, advanced to our heroine, to whom she announced herself

self as the abbess.—“ I am,” said she, “ the lady Stephania, the respected superior of this holy monastery ; and, if I am rightly informed by our aged portress, you, daughter, hearing of the sweet serenity, concord, and piety, in which we dwell, in this our beautiful retirement, have turned from the unrighteous paths of the great world, and are come to be a participator in our hallowed joys, and tread with us the shortest road to heaven ?”

This was a sort of jargon by no means calculated to make a favourable impression of her on Victoria, who almost turned away from her in disgust ; but recollecting how impolitic it would be to do so, she constrained herself to answer ; yet, a stranger to dissimulation, she paused a while ere she did answer, for it was necessary now to her security to assume the feigned name, and, should she be interrogated, relate the feigned story she had decided on.—“ Yes, madam,” said she, “ domestic circumstances have driven me from
my

my home, and compelled me to seek your protection. You *are* rightly informed—it is my desire to become an inmate of your sacred abode, where, I trust, the serenity and concord you speak of will, in time, restore my mind to its wonted tranquillity.”

“Your sorrows alone, daughter, demand my protection for you; they are, no doubt, the consequences of your intercourse with a wicked and ungodly world; and as such, my holy profession binds me to receive you, to preserve you in future from their evil ways, and shelter in my bosom a penitent sinner; besides, you will, of course, soon entitle yourself to that protection by another claim—you will enter the happy state of the noviciate, and finally take the veil.”

Here she paused, rather fearfully, as if she had expressed an unreasonable wish, and was waiting to abide by the reply.

Fortunately for her hopes, this was exactly

actly what our self-exiled heroine had previously resolved on.—“Alas, madam!” she mournfully replied, “such is the determination I have been compelled to, by injustice and tyranny, both of which, I trust, I shall be safe from here.”

“Doubt it not, my child. You have, directed by the Virgin, chosen a sanctuary, where peace, meekness, and religion, dwell in their divinest forms. We are all here the chosen of Heaven, to instruct and reform our erring species.”

Victoria cast a look of strong contempt on her, totally unable to disguise it.

Stephania, evidently disconcerted by it, bit her lip, as turning round she observed —“I confess, daughter, to one accustomed to luxurious pleasures and joys, as possibly you may have been, the sombre aspect of our tranquil seclusion holds out no gilded baits. *We* entrap not the young and unwary into guile; *we* indulge not
in

in selfish or sinful gratifications; *we* varnish not our words or actions to tempt strangers to our society; but if voluntarily they come to us, we receive them with open arms, actuated by the purest friendship; and if they prove worthy of being loved, we *do* love them with truly maternal and Christian affection."

"I hope I shall be deemed deserving of it, lady," coldly replied Victoria, at the same time unclasping a little bag of green brocade, and drawing from it a purse, whose golden contents glittered brightly through the network, more transcendently radiant and joy-inspiring in the avaricious eyes of Stephania, than the most resplendent rays the eagle's eye had ever beheld emanating from the sun. "At present, lady, accept this for my admission. It is a mere trifle; but all your further demands on me shall be amply satisfied."

The offer was almost incredible. The
purse

purse was heavy with gold. If such was what she termed "a mere trifle," what might not be expected from her liberality hereafter?

Doubtful for a moment, the abbess hesitated; then, to convince herself that it was no delusion, she extended her hand, and clasped the solid prize.

The very touch communicated to her whole frame a feeling so exquisite and delightful, that all her features, which had once been strikingly handsome and intelligent, but were now pale and haggard, seemed to sparkle with their former animation; but it was the animated horrid glare of avarice, and Victoria perfectly understood it. — "Oh, dearly-beloved daughter," said she, "do not urge me to take this!" at the same time pocketing it, with all imaginable condescension. "You surely cannot spare so vast a sum at once; you may want *a little* yourself. Do now
permit

permit me to take it out of my pocket again, and give you *a few* pieces, if you should be distressed."

"I am *not* distressed, madam," returned Victoria, haughtily; "but yet—I thank you for your kindness," she would have added; but Stephania, not knowing what was to come, her *kindness* took the alarm, and she hastily interrupted her, letting the purse drop safely into her pocket, and then folding her arms across, and trying to appear vastly disappointed, "Well, my child, since you *will not* receive back any part of it, I suppose I must keep it. I dare not press you, for I see you have a proud and noble spirit, and will be an ornament to our convent, to the various uses of which I will devote this your sacred offering."

She now turned to lock the money in her bureau, and meantime one of the nuns entered, of a sharp, uncouth, and care-worn visage, which had once been handsome,

some, but was now very little calculated to inspire admiration or esteem; her whole appearance, owing, in a great measure, to her dress, was vulgar and unprepossessing, insomuch that Victoria, supposing her to be one of the lay-sisters (a class employed in the menial offices of the convent), merely glanced at her as she came in, without noticing her further.

Of herself, however, the proud, illiberal, ignorant Constantia had not so mean an opinion. Accustomed to exact homage, and at least outward respect, from every one she had any power over, her towering pride was stung by this apparent slight, and drawing up her long bony neck, with all the *hauteur* her disagreeable form and countenance were capable of expressing, she threw a scornful look at our heroine, as she brushed by her, and advancing towards the superior, demanded—"Who has your ladyship got here?"

"One who will be a worthy member
of

of our community, daughter. She is but just now arrived."

"Oh, ay!" resumed Constantia, as contemptuously as she could, "I suppose this is the young woman whose father was so insolent to Garcia this morning at the gates. Who are you, child?" she continued, turning towards her with an air of superiority—What is your name?"

"I am a gentlewoman, madam, by birth, and, I trust, by education and manners," returned the other, with cold dignity. "My name is Donna Clara de Manzilla."

"I think then that Donna Clara de Manzilla should have condescended to make a proper obeisance, when she found herself in the presence of the senora Constantia, one of the nuns of the holy convent of St. Agnes. Methinks your deportment contradicts your assertions, Donna Clara."

Victoria's disposition was naturally gentle and unassuming, but all her pride was roused by this malignant and unmerited
insult;

insult; her cheeks glowed with it, nobility itself was in her majestic figure as she arose, and, with striking dignity, retorted —“ To you, madam, I will *never* condescend to make obeisance. *Your* deportment, whoever you are, classes you far beneath the one I took you for;” and walking to another part of the room, she reseated herself.

“ Whom did you take me for ?” asked the nun, indignantly.

“ A menial,” was the calm reply.

“ A menial !” reiterated the enraged Constantia. “ Jesu Maria ! a menial ! Was ever the like said to me before ? Will your ladyship (addressing the abbess) suffer me to be thus affronted in your presence ? By the holy sacrament, I will not bear it !”

The superior had been busy in counting the gold into a drawer, and so intent on her occupation, as not to have noticed what passed until thus accosted ; but the last words forcibly struck her.—“ Daughter,
ter,

ter, daughter," said she, frowning through the satisfaction and delight that still gleamed over her wrinkled brows, "daughter, I pray you be more temperate in your language!"

"Temperate, good mother! I wonder who *could* be temperate at being so insulted. It would make yourself rave and swear!"

"Oh, most unpardonable profanation!" cried Stephania. "I rave or swear! Dare not again to shock my ears with so diabolical an imputation, or dearly shall you repent the falsehood."

"It is no falsehood," maintained Constantia, determined on recrimination. "I say you can both rave and swear, and curse too, as well as another. Ay, and St. Agnes herself would rave and swear at being treated so."

"Silence!" roared the abbess; "silence, mad woman, and quit the room! Do you want to have the vengeance of that blessed saint coming thundering about our heads?"

heads? Instantly withdraw to the chapel, prostrate yourself before her image, and there, by fasting, prayer, and penance, atone, if possible, for your enormous guilt, and avert the tremendous evils that will otherwise befall us. My friendship is as easily forfeited as gained."

"I think I have fasted long enough," muttered the nun, in an under-tone; "I had only four meals yesterday, while you pampered yourself with nine. Hypocrite!" she continued, "I will have satisfaction on you both!"

Her words escaped their ears, and petulantly flouncing out, she banged the door after her with such violence, that its echo was heard all over the convent.

"Vile, treacherous fiend!" exclaimed the abbess, when she was gone, in a storm of passion, forgetful, for a moment, of the "sweet serenity, Christian charity, and concord," for which she had been so highly

ly

ly extolling herself and her holy community. "Vile, treacherous fiend! I wish she was dead, or that she had never come here, to brood over her villainous plots; but I will unmask her."

"I think, lady," observed Victoria, mildly, "she has sufficiently unmasked herself."

"Eh! unmask! What said I, daughter?" asked the abbess, starting in alarm, as if she had unconsciously said too much. "I entreat you, tell me candidly what I said?"

"That you wished her dead, and would unmask her!"

"Dead! Heaven preserve her! *I* wish her dead! No, no, child, you must have mistaken me. Dear sweet soul! God keep her from all harm! She is a little stubborn now and again, to be sure, but her real disposition, when you find it out, is as mild and angelic as my own."

Her real disposition had, unfortunately,
betrayed

betrayed itself already, and there was so little of the mild and angelic in it, that the abbess did not gain much in Victoria's estimation by the comparison; nor, indeed, had she formed any very flattering opinion of her disposition before.

Anxious to change the subject, and to appear somewhat more conciliating than she had hitherto been, she took a seat beside our heroine, and began a string of the same fulsome compliments on her auditor's numerous recommendations, which she was accustomed to pour into the ears of every newcomer, with the view of gaining their good opinion, not at all suspecting how different was their effect.—“Now, my sweet girl,” said she, “now that we are by ourselves, let my compassionate ear hear the sad recital of your sorrows; fancy yourself confiding them to a fond and affectionate parent, who will sooth them with maternal tenderness, and weep over them as her own. Be candid, daughter—

conceal nothing from me—let me have the happiness of addressing you by your name. In a word, I would know what were the fortunate events that drove you from amongst mankind, and thus ensured your eternal salvation.”

Victoria had never practised the task of dissimulation; it was a task which her gentle heart had ever forbidden her to learn, and therefore she had ever been proof against all that would have instructed her in it; but now she saw that, consistent with the necessity of keeping her real name concealed, she absolutely *must* dissemble, though, so awkward and unpromising was her first attempt, that none could have pronounced her ever likely to excel in it.

As clearly and concisely as her embarrassment would permit, she described herself as the daughter of don Jasper de Manzilla, a nobleman of the court of Warsaw, who

Who having insisted on her receiving the addresses of a man she disliked, and finally, having been about to force her to give him her hand, had compelled her to the desperate expedient of quitting her father's house for ever, to save herself from the commission of a still more flagitious crime, that of yielding her hand to a husband, without the sanction of her heart, and voluntarily doing what would render her for ever unhappy.

Victoria was fearful that she would censure this step as a breach of filial duty, but happily the abbess was troubled with none of those nice scruples of conscience so very irksome and inconvenient to folks whose interest it is to flatter the weaknesses, the foibles, and often the crimes of others, and, with a most amiable and accommodating sort of sophistry, persuade themselves that vice itself is commendable, if it suits their views to make it appear so.—“ Rejoice, my child,” said she,

“at the apparent injustice and tyranny of that father—rejoice and be glad at what you deemed the cruelty of his nature; it was the inspiration of Heaven, whose agent he unconsciously was in the preservation of your poor soul. Bless the man your father would have wedded you to, even though you hate and despise him—pray for him all the days of your life, for oh, daughter, were it not for him, you had probably never fled the snares spread for you—you had never thought perhaps of a world to come.”

“*That, madam,*” said Victoria, impressively, “is what I can never forget while life and reason are spared me. My sense of duty to my Creator is such as my entering a monastery can neither diminish or augment.”

Abashed at this reproof, the superior arose, to avoid betraying any confusion; and having rung a small bell, one of the lay sisters appeared to her command—a short,

short, squab figure; with a fat, silly, and unmeaning face; and her speech betrayed her to be quite as silly and devoid of common sense as she looked.

“Fetch us some breakfast, good Bertha,” said the abbess; and turning to Victoria—“Daughter,” rejoined she, “our food here is plain, and what best beseemeth the humble and meek-hearted. We *do* sometimes indulge in a morning’s meal, but it is only after a long course of fasting and penance, and then the herb of the field is our meat, and the milk of the goat our drink; nothing else ever passes our lips, for, to taste of the luxuries that corrupt the world; we here hold a most shameful abomination. Bertha, fetch in two lettuces, some salt, two dried biscuits, and a pint of goat’s milk, if our scanty store will afford us so many good things this morning.”

“I will, most holy lady,” replied Bertha, turning up the whites of her large eyes, and curtsying awkwardly; “but

sister Frances has mixed too much rain-water with the milk, and so it is all turned as sour as vinegar."

"Peace, fool!" cried the abbess, mortified and enraged at having such a thing divulged. "Mix *water* with it! how dare you tell me so? Go and fetch some fresh from the goat instantly!"

"Holy St. Agnes!" ejaculated the simple Bertha, with a ludicrous stare, "does not your ladyship know it is done every day in the year?" Then, by way of deprecating her anger, she added—"If I can't get any fresh milk, shall I fetch the ham, and the fricasseed fowl, and the cherry-brandy, out of the cupboard in your ladyship's bed-room?"

Amidst all her sadness, Victoria could not help smiling at the open-mouthed simpleton who had made such a discovery. It was indeed a discovery rather too provoking for "meekness, piety, or Christian charity," to bear, without shewing a temper very far from being mild or angelic.

Forgetful

Forgètful at once of dignity, piety, and decorum, the exasperated Stephania started from her chair, and in a voice almost choked with passion—"Audacious, infamous liar!" exclaimed she, raising her clenched hand, as if to strike her, "how dare you impiously talk in this sanctified place of ham, fricassee, or brandy? how dare you presume to offend my ears, or pollute the air of this apartment, by uttering such words—such vile and abominable insinuations? Did you ever know *me* to be guilty of eating ham, or drinking cherry-brandy?"

"Never, never!" cried the terrified Bertha, dropping on her knees in an attitude of supplication, very far from graceful; "I never saw such a thing enter your lips as ham or cherry-brandy—never in my life, as I am a virgin. Oh, reverend mother, forgive me, and I'll swear black and blue that all you say is true, whether it is or not, as I did when your ladyship got tipsy the last eve of St. Agnes, and
c 4 you

you bid me tell sister Frances it was the spasms in your throat, and so I told her; but she said—”

The abbess now became outrageous, and unable longer to contain her fiery passions within any thing like moderation. She stamped violently on the floor; and her teeth chattering with fury, she aimed so determined a blow at her unfortunate victim, as felled her instantly at her feet.

“ Oh, cruel, hard-hearted barbarian!” burst from the lips of our heroine, who, shocked and disgusted at her brutality, could no longer conceal her sentiments of this unfeeling and unprincipled woman.

Stephania’s ear, ever attentive to all that concerned herself, caught the exclamation instantly; but it being neither politic nor convenient to notice it now, she did not think proper to appear to have heard it. But far was it from her intention to let it
pass

pass unregarded. Never yet had any one in her power, who ventured to express their real opinion of her, escaped her punishment and her hatred — never, with impunity, had any thing in the shape of insult been offered to her; if policy forbade her to resent it at the moment, it rankled deeply within her treacherous and vindictive bosom, until an opportunity occurred for ample vengeance, and then woe to the unhappy being whose fate was in her hands! Victoria's unguarded speech stung her pride almost into madness, and roused her unappeasable spirit of vengeance. Once offended, she was at heart inexorable; no power, no concession, could conciliate her; and this was an insult she determined that nothing should erase from her memory, until revenge was hers to its full extent.

Perfect mistress of all the arts of dissimulation, and recollecting how far she had for a moment betrayed herself in presence of one whose good opinion it was yet her

c 5.

interest

interest to preserve, she resumed her seat ; and trying to hide her vexation under a smile of placidity—" You see, daughter," said she, " I know how to maintain the dignity of my station. I punish insolence, and I reward merit, and am revered for my impartial kindness throughout the convent. Happy are they who conciliate my favour."

" No matter at what price, you would add," thought Victoria ; but aware of the imprudence of coming to an open rupture, which she knew that any thing else she could take umbrage at would undoubtedly produce, she very wisely assented, by her silence, to Stephania's good opinion of herself.

Bertha was in reality more frightened than hurt ; but determined to make the most of it, she uttered a hideous scream, which loudly resounding through the whole building, five or six nuns presently came running in, in consternation, to know
what

what had happened, and found Bertha still sprawling on the floor, and making such horrible faces, that, in defiance of their respect and reverence for the superior, and their compassion for the poor lay-sister, they burst into a loud laugh.

“What is the matter, Bertha?” demanded one of them.

“My sides are only battered and bruised, that is all,” replied the fallen sufferer, in a tone of as much humility as she could assume. “Our sweet lady abbess, the holy Virgin bless her! has done me the honour to knock me down.”

“One of the honours she is most lavish in the distribution of,” observed a pretty young novice, to a nun who stood beside her.

“Yes,” whispered the latter, “she has been at some of her old pranks again.”

“Take that audacious prating fool instantly hence,” said the abbess, fearful of further discoveries; “away with her to

the black cell under the chapel, and there I command that she be confined three days on salt and water. Such is the punishment of falsehood."

"What falsehood, lady, has she dared to utter?" inquired a nun.

"The Lord reward your kindness, holy mother!" stammered Bertha, as she turned herself on all fours, and slowly raised her squat figure to an erect posture; "may I not have half a hard biscuit, the Lord reward you?"

"No!" insisted the abbess, "you shall not—you are never thankful for any thing."

"Nay, don't you remember, holy mother, how thankful I was for the piece of ham you gave me on Friday last, and you said——"

"Away with her, this instant!" reiterated Stephanina.

None was sufficiently beyond her jurisdiction to hazard a refusal, and at her desire they led away their blubbering captive,

tive, whose only fault in reality was having told the truth.

The object of her resentment having been removed, her deportment wore something more of the complaisant to Victoria; and to make amends for the want of fresh goat's milk, she ordered, not indeed ham, fricassee, or cherry brandy, which, by the way, was sacred to her own private use, but some excellent coffee, which she thought proper to have found amongst the stores, and which, she said, she took as a *medicine* (a most agreeable one it was!) whenever any thing put her nerves out of order.

Whilst supplying her companion, and regaling herself with about half-a-dozen cups of no very moderate size, her nerves and spirits did certainly appear to be recovering themselves. A degree of *plaisanterie* and liveliness stole imperceptibly into her conversation, that astonished, and
for

for a while really amused, our heroine, making her forgetful of her sorrows, in contemplating the strange character of a woman, whose face was now decked in smiles and sunshine—that face which, but half an hour before, had been darkened and disfigured by all the horrid and malignant rage of a demon. But delusive and deceitful were her smiles; she ever made them subservient to some sinister purpose—sinister indeed, for her sophistry and her smiles had now completely beguiled Victoria into a fatal promise to take the oath of the noviciate.

The ceremony of administering this oath was to be formally performed in the chapel, for which purpose the superior issued her command, that all the professed sisterhood should assemble there immediately after the midday service.

CHAP-

CHAPTER II.
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Who dares mean one thing and another tell,  
My soul detests him as the gates of hell.

*Pope's Homer.*

THIS order had scarcely been given, when, with a downcast look of humility and penitence, Constantia returned, and besought the superior's pardon for her offence, promising, with apparent contrition, that such should never occur again.

Since her entering the convent, this nun had ever been in the confidence of the abbess—a circumstance that very soon had gained her the ill-will of such of the sisterhood as in their tempers and dispositions bore a striking resemblance to herself, while the insolent air of superiority she immediately

immediately assumed, and the vulgar and illiberal propensities she could not help betraying, gave equal umbrage to the rest. To this, then, her favourite and devoted minion, Stephania readily acceded the forgiveness she required; but each had, in their *reconciliation*, their own distinct views, and those of Constantia were far from being of the most amicable nature.

“ You are, I suppose, aware, daughter,” said the abbess to the yet-kneeling penitent, “ that this day is the eve of our feast of the Annunciation, and is to be observed throughout the convent with all due solemnity; and besides, within two hours our other well-beloved daughter here enters her noviciate.”

A smile, to which it was impossible to give any definite meaning, shot over Constantia's haggard features, as she heard of Victoria's determination—a determination prompted,

prompted, alas! whenever joy of earth had withered from it, by her almost-breaking heart, as the only source whence consolation could ever arise.—“Guided by the wise counsel, the virtuous precepts, the bright example, the tender care, and the parental love of our revered lady abbess,” said she, constraining herself to address Victoria, “you will experience here the only real happiness this sublunary world affords—nay, child, let not the thought of being immured in a convent throw a gloom over your spirits; believe me, you will experience every kindness from the abbess, if deserving of it; to be so is in your power. If you merit her invaluable friendship, she will treat you as a friend, as she has condescended to treat me, for which nothing can ever obliterate my gratitude, esteem, and respect——”

“Nay, nay, my dearest Constantia,” interrupted the abbess, averting her face in modest confusion, and, with inimitable grace and cleverness, playing off the embarrassment

barrassment she pretended to feel at hearing herself and her actions thus extolled—  
“dearest Constantia, I pray you forbear, if you wish not to see my cheeks covered with burning blushes; praises do but tend to excite vanity. Oh, my sweet friend, spare your encomiums, for indeed I am certain I merit not the half of them.”

“Indeed, holy mother, you certainly do not,” thought Constantia; “we there perfectly coincide.” But whatever her thoughts or her intentions were, she was not to be thus defeated in the pleasure of enumerating to Victoria the favours she might expect from the superior’s bounty. “Yes, child,” she resumed, “the strongest ties of gratitude bind me to her. In a very few weeks after my arrival here, I received the most signal proofs of her friendship. She praised me, flattered me, made me her confidante, told me *all* her secrets—aye, secrets that she dared not impart to her confessor—brought me to her own table—conversed sociably and kindly with me on  
the

the pleasures of that world we had both been obliged to quit for ever—fed me with luxuries that never met the eye of any other of the sisterhood. When sickness came upon me, she visited me—gave up her very prayers to do so—nourished me with all her own rich cordials, her very best hock and bucellas, which nobody ever tastes but herself, and her very finest rati-fia too—loaded me with all sorts of delicacies. Say, then, ought I not to feel grateful, and to bless her for all this? and you, sister, will also bless her, for all this will she do for you if you deserve it.”

“Indeed I shall do no such thing,” exclaimed the abbess, vehemently, unable, until this moment, to interrupt her, from excess of passion, which she dared not to betray. “Daughter Constantia, I desire you will instantly hold your tongue. It does not become me to listen to such unqualified praises—such *exaggerations*.”

All the bitterness of her vexation was  
apparent

apparent in the strong emphasis she laid on the last word; and Constantia's countenance wore a smile of ill-nature at the malicious discovery of the wines and cordials she had thus made, under the mask of *gratitude!*

The bell summoning them to prayers, at length put an end to the subject; and Victoria, glad to be relieved from society, so irksome and disagreeable, prepared to attend mass.

Unlike the rest of the convent, the chapel was a magnificent structure of hewn stone, arrayed internally in all the glittering pomp of wealth, and all the formality of Catholic superstition. On three spacious compartments of the ceiling were painted, in a masterly style, the Birth, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ, the whole piece supported by cherubs of virgin gold. On a pedestal of the same precious metal, stood an image, in rich Parian

rian

rian marble, of St. Agnes, on which was an inscription of the date of the foundation of the monastery, besides an account of numerous miracles the saint had wrought, from time to time, on the spot where the chapel was erected.

The altar was of the finest ebony, inlaid with gold and silver, and above it hung a superb painting of the Last Supper. In a recess, at one side of it, stood the organ, from which a full and sonorous peal, accompanied by the voices of the choir, burst forth the moment the lady abbess, in all the majesty of her station, made her appearance.

The service was solemn and impressive. During its performance Victoria's every thought was detached from earth, and that heaven, where she hoped to meet her beloved Theodore, alone occupied her.

When the last hymn was sung, the novices

vices all withdrew from the chapel, and a procession of the nuns filed up towards the altar on either side. Within the railing that enclosed it, on a sort of throne for the purpose, covered with the richest Genoa velvet, sat the superior, holding in her hand a small missal. Between the two rows of the nuns, Victoria, with a pensive and graceful step, advanced towards the altar. Seldom had she looked more lovely or interesting. She was habited in a long robe of white muslin; her glossy hair, of bright auburn, fell in a profusion of ringlets over her shoulders, covered by a thin veil, that hid the melancholy of her features, and extended down almost to her feet.

Having reached the steps, she bent her knee on a cushion before the abbess, from whom she received the missal.—“Take this holy book, daughter,” said she, “and here, in presence of these thy sisters, swear by the true faith it teacheth, and the religion thou

thou dost profess, that, for ever renouncing the world and its sins, to become the faithful servant and follower of Christ and the gospel, thou dost with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and freewill, enter this the happy and blessed state of the novice; and when such novice shall terminate, thou wilt further fulfil thy vows, and take the veil."

"As a pledge of my truth, do I give thee back this sacred book," replied Victoria, returning the missal. "My vow is passed, and I am Heaven's and thine."

"Thus do we invest thee, Clara de Manzilla," resumed the abbess, "with the garb and cross of our order; henceforth thy name is enrolled as a novice of the convent of St. Agnes;" and, taking off the white veil Victoria had worn, she substituted one of thicker and coarser texture, at the same time throwing round her neck a string of beads, to which was attached a silver crucifix. "Arise now," she resumed, "and join your sister novices in  
the

the cloisters ; you will afterwards be conducted to the cell allotted to you. Daughters," (to the nuns) "retire ye now to your respective cells ; we will spend the hours between this and vespers in useful and pious meditations."

The sisterhood now all smiled graciously upon Victoria as she passed them ; and on quitting the chapel, they pressed around, eager to greet her as their future companion.

From their fulsome jargon of compliments and commendations, which even their long separation from society had not been able to make these fair recluses forget, Victoria anxiously withdrew to her little cell.

Here indeed was a contrast to the cheerfulness, the elegance, and the splendour she had all her lifetime been accustomed to in her father's house. This was truly the  
abode

abode of solitude, silence, and misery. It was narrow, dark, and high; the walls were covered by a sort of grey plaster; and a small grated window near the roof, by admitting a few rays of daylight, just served to shew every object in all its natural gloominess. In one corner stood a wretched pallet, covered with a few of the ordinary bed-clothes, in bad condition, and beside it a solitary chair; in another, the broken statue of a saint frowned horribly on all around it; and in a third was a large wooden crucifix, with an effigy of the Saviour nailed to it.

Such a scene, with rather less of the dismal and bigoted about it, would have been somewhat in unison with our heroine's feelings at the time; for she was, in truth, spiritless, dejected, and unhappy; and, alas! nothing in her present situation promised the slightest alleviation of that unhappiness, except the consolations of her own pious heart, which made her submit unrepiningly to all the decrees of un-

erring Providence, however rigorous and severe they might to her weak understanding appear to be. Her bosom was full; grief and anguish were labouring there; tears were trickling slowly down her cheeks, and at length she seated herself on the bed, unable to prevent them from flowing abundantly. Now it was that she really saw herself separated from father, friends, and home, and felt all the agonies of such a separation—from Theodore, too, and for ever!—"Oh, now," said she, "now indeed am I truly wretched—now are my sufferings at their height: yet," added she, raising her hands and eyes, "those sufferings are but of earth. In another—another and a better world, my Theodore, shall I rejoin thee; there no sorrow, no misfortune, comes. Nor let me say that I am wretched, forsaken, or deserted. Who can be wretched that have Heaven for their hope?—who can be deserted that have their divine Creator for their companion and their friend? None. And, oh, my God, amidst all my trials,  
still,

still, still art thou with me—still art thou my comforter and my upholder!”

Drying her tears, she knelt down beside the bed, and remained for some time in devout and fervent prayer.

Religion is indeed the sweetest balm to a wounded spirit; placing our confidence and trust in a higher and supreme Power, we feel ourselves superior to the petty ills and vexations that thwart us in this little world—they sink into insignificance, and in presence of the Deity, we think but of him alone. Such were the reflections that reconciled Victoria to her fate, and when she arose, her mind was serene and composed.

In about an hour afterwards, she heard a gentle tapping at the door of her cell; and opening it, she beheld, to her astonishment, and by no means to her gratification, the nun Constantia standing before her—the unamiable nun, who, unprovoked,

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had

had treated her with such rude and brutal insolence at their first meeting. Displeas- ed at her intrusion, Victoria could not so far play the hypocrite as to receive her with any thing but formality and cold- ness.

Nothing daunted, however, by a recep- tion that would have chilled any body possessed of less effrontery, Constantia, whose portion of it was far from being very limited, advanced, and with little ceremo- ny took a seat. Holding out her hand to Victoria—"I come, my sweet girl," said she, "to entreat your forgiveness and your friendship. Pardon—forget what is past—think of this morning no more, and call me by the endearing title of sister and of friend—do not, do not harbour resent- ment in your bosom against a penitent of- fender!"

"Resentment, senora, is not amongst my present feelings," replied Victoria, coldly; "you have my forgiveness."

"But

“ But your friendship, Clara, dearest Clara, say, shall I not have that ?”

“ The friendship of one with whom you are unacquainted yet, cannot be so very desirable; and mine can be of little service to any one—it would but poorly repay the trouble of suing for it.”

“ Alas! alas, then! I see it is as I feared—I have too deeply played a part, a painful part, that policy suggested—I have incautiously given an offence that nothing can ever obliterate from your memory, and you now hate, despise, and detest me.”

As she said this, the tears, which were ever conveniently at her command, rushed from her eyes, powerfully aiding her words in appealing to Victoria's heart—a heart full of tenderest compassion, and “ the milk of human kindness.”—“ None,” said she, “ none, I trust, are deserving of my hate; but to the one who thus craves my friendship, I cannot, will not, if she prove worthy of it, deny it;” and taking her yet extended hand, “ I do forgive you,” she

added; "let it be forgotten, and if my friendship *can* be of use to you, it is yours."

"Heard I aright? said you, indeed, you would forgive me?" cried Constantia, throwing herself on her neck, and weeping more copiously. Angel! paragon of loveliness, of excellence, of heavenly virtue, and is it such a one to whom I dared to offer insult! Oh! what a wretch have I been! and yet you are thus generous—thus magnanimous!"

"Do not weep so, my sister, I entreat you," said Victoria, gently raising her head; "let us dismiss the unpleasant subject, to talk or think of it no more."

"We will dismiss it presently, but not until I have fully explained the motives from which I acted towards you, with such apparent hostility and rudeness: the constrained kindness of our lady abbess to you, or the gracious smiles she forced her demoniac physiognomy to assume before you, cannot have rendered your senses  
blind

blind to the black depravity of her real disposition, which, God mend her! nothing can ever hide from the eye of any common observer—certainly not! now tell me candidly what you *think* of her, and I will afterwards tell you what she *is*.”

That this was a base and treacherous artifice to entrap her—to lure her into some expression of disrespect for the superior, that would assuredly be productive of her bitter and lasting enmity, Victoria did not doubt, and eyeing her with mingled distrust and horror at her duplicity, she cautiously replied—“ The lady abbess has promised me her maternal care, assured me, that here I shall find tranquillity and peace, and wherefore should I doubt it? If to wear the smiles of courtesy is not natural to her countenance, why should she force them on it for me? *Me*, in particular, she could have no interest in deceiving. I cannot think her so base, be her disposition otherwise what it may.”

“ *You* in particular!” sneered Constan-

tia; "so this, forsooth, is *your* opinion; now then for mine, ay, and you shall have it unreservedly given too. I marked the glances of suspicion you directed towards me but now, when I spoke of this detestable woman; but they wronged me—by my soul, they did! and in defiance of all your suspicions, I will open your eyes to the character of Stephania, for I fear not that your lips will ever betray me. You, sister, are not the only one she has deceived, and will continue to deceive, as long as her body retains the breath of life. I have experienced her treacheries—I, and every one else in the convent; long and dearly-bought experience has taught me to know her disposition and her cruelties—those cruelties she shall rue, for all shall know them, and retribution will come ere long. Yes," she resumed, after a moment's pause, while an expression of mingled irony and vengeance gleamed, in spite of her, from her meteor eyes—"she can smile, and she can stab at the same time;

time; she can speak you fairly, and, with sweetest affectation of courtesy, promise you her protection—*her* protection! let her seek protection for herself; a sword hangs over her devoted head, and who shall guard her? who shall avert it? none, none! by St. Agnes, it shall fall when least she dreads it.”

Here her impetuosity was beginning to betray her, but she suddenly stopped, and cast a fearful look at Victoria, who shuddered as if it was the look of a serpent that would charm her to destruction.—“To what does all this tend?” asked the latter.

“To the best purposes, senora—to prove me worthy of your confidence, in giving you mine; and to put you on your guard against the wiles and machinations of an insinuating, artful, plausible, hypocritical, canting, treacherous woman; all this is the *pious* and *reverend* lady abbess of St. Agnes; and remember, it is a friend, and one who has your interest at heart, that

warns you thus, ere experience comes to convince you that you *have* trusted and been deceived—what say you now ?”

“ I will never leave it in her power to betray me,” answered Victoria, half-inclined, after all, to believe this friend a sincere one, and credit her professions—“ I thank you for the information, and shall not use it unworthily.”

The nun saw her advantage, and pursued it.—“ If yet suspicion lurks in a corner of your breast,” said she, “ answer me one question, senora, ingenuously, and as your heart shall dictate : wherefore, if not for *your* sake—*your* interest, should I have been thus free in my communications ? wherefore, I ask, if not for your sake, should I have made such communications at all ?”

Self-interest was evidently as little the actuator of Constantia’s conduct towards her, as that of the abbess ; and if so, surely nothing else but good wishes and motives

tives of kindness could have prompted all she had said, for how could she profit by traducing the superior's character to her? It did not occur to her, that Constantia might be gratifying her own vindictive feelings more than at present appeared.

“I do believe you well inclined towards me,” she answered, “and shall gratefully remember what you have told me; I shall ever be guarded against doing aught that might make the abbess my enemy.”

“I am satisfied then,” said Constantia, and a smile of satisfaction certainly shewed that she was. “Yes, my dear sister, be ever watchful of your most trifling words and actions, for hereabouts are many prying eyes and ears; hereabouts are those who would eagerly seize any thing offensive that you might involuntarily utter, to bear it to Stephania's ear, and bring upon you punishment and disgrace. That the abbess is passionate and revengeful, I need not tell you, but much

of her character you have yet to learn. Towards the novices she exercises the cruellest severities; and any nun evincing the least feeling of kindness or sympathy for them, instantly forfeits her favour, and with it forfeits almost every thing that renders existence at all supportable here. This—this alone was the cause, and a powerful and imperative one it was, of my seeming rudeness and indecorum to you this morning.\*

“Do not revert to that again—be it entirely forgotten.”

“Well, be it so indeed, noble, generous-minded girl! let us henceforth be united by the dearest ties of that friendship you promise me; and so united, endeavour to render ourselves, in this abode, as happy as on earth *nuns* can expect to be.”

“Alas for me!” sighed Victoria, “if my days pass unruffled by future ill, it is all I can hope for. Happiness I once did dream of, and, oh! a sweet—a blissful dream it was; but long it lasted not—soon,  
soon

soon I awoke to reality, and never did the vision return!"

"It was Heaven's will, dear Clara, that it should not; were we to place any value upon this world's paltry joys, we might perhaps forget the necessity of preparing ourselves for those of a world to come."

"Oh, no, no! term not the sickly and capricious smiles of fortune here *joys!* surely, surely we must be weak, imbecile, and wicked beings, if such could wean our minds from heaven!"

"True, my sweet counsellor, this life is but a scene of sorrow and affliction, and rather calculated to make us look forward with hopes of a better one. I speak, woe is me! from my own sad experience—I too," passing her hand across her eyes, as if to wipe away a tear—"I too have dreamt of happiness, and fancied I possessed it—fancied I held a shadow! fatal, fatal error! my credulity has undone me, and how, you shall now hear:—

"My

“ My family were noble Spaniards; part of whom being fervently attached to the memorable house of Braganza, and the rest wholly disaffected, a warm controversy arose between them, which, alas! terminated in the proscription of them all.

“ Confiscation and perpetual exilement was the dreadful sentence pronounced against them—resistance was of no avail; supplication, interest, *all* failed, and they were banished! My father and mother fled, with my brother and myself, their only children, to Poland, where we had some opulent relatives of high rank; but our sun of happiness had set in clouds of woe, and the frown of royalty was the signal for the rest of our misfortunes. By those relatives we were slighted, and finally avoided, and poverty stared us in the face; for the little ready money we had been enabled to carry with us was, by this time, nearly all expended, and the plate and jewels we had secreted were also gone  
for

for our subsistence. Poverty and starvation, however, had been blessings compared to the miseries that followed.

“ In my infancy I had been accounted handsome; but as I grew up to maturer years, I was, unfortunately for me, generally known by the name of ‘ the beautiful Constantia;’ that attractive appellation reached the ears of a young nobleman in our neighbourhood, elegant and accomplished, whose seducing arts, as I afterwards learned, few women had been able to resist; in an hour fatal to my peace, he came on some frivolous pretence to our house, in order that he might see me, and form his own opinion of my much talked-of beauty and fascinations. Unhappily he *did* see me, and seeing, admired and wooed me.

“ I did not less admire him, for he was extremely handsome in person, and seemed to be every thing amiable—every thing that captivates woman. Three days had he not known me, ere he made professions—ardent

—ardent and open professions, of a sincere and honourable passion.

“Anxious, if possible, to retrieve our shattered circumstances, my father joyfully listened to his proposals, believing them to be totally disinterested, and prompted by his love for me, for he had represented to him my portionless state, and my family’s disgrace. Still, with unwearied assiduity, he persevered in his suit; his views, he said, were not mercenary; his fortune being ample, he required no more—he loved me for myself alone—in fine, that he could not, or would not, exist without me—that I was all the world to him. Simple, credulous, unacquainted with the baseness and the perfidious treacheries of mankind, and, moreover, loving Manfred with all the ardency of a young and inexperienced female mind, I listened with rapture to his proffered vows, received them, and gave him, in return, a solemn assurance that I would be his—opened to him my guileless, innocent heart—convinced him  
that

that he was equally beloved--that he was to me the dearest object on earth; in short, my confessions to him were more than strict female delicacy warranted. Oh, villain! consummate artful villain! damnable, odious deceiver! how did he repay my ingenuous, but imprudent confidence! He had won my heart's best affections, and seeing that he had--seeing that the gift was in his possession, soon divested it of its charm: a delay, unaccountable to me, took place on his part, as to naming a time for the celebration of our nuptials, and alone with him one day, I at length ventured to entreat that he would inform me of the cause of that delay; but judge of my astonishment, indignation, and horror, when the wretch, softening the flagrant insult as much as he could, told me that *marriage* had never been his intention, and proposed that I should become his mistress--his mistress!

“ Oh! the hand of Heaven itself surely withheld

withheld me at that dreadful moment, or I had snatched the poniard from his side, and stabbed him to the heart: for some time my fury was ungovernable, rendered still more so by his continuing to outrage my feelings, by offers of liberal annuities and settlements on myself and family—the price of my dishonour! I spoke daggers to him, though I used none; my very looks told him the frenzy of my soul, and he shrunk dismayed from the glance that would, if possible, have instantly annihilated him.

“ I was rushing from him—rushing from contagion and guilt—flying, as I would have recoiled from a beast of prey, when he caught hold of my garment and detained me.—‘ Stay yet,’ said he—‘ stay, too haughty, lovely, virtuous fair one—a moment stay, and hear me farther!’

‘ Monster! I will hear no more!’ cried I, dashing him from me with the contempt I felt.

‘ Nay,’

‘Nay,’ persisted he, again holding my robe, ‘I conjure—I entreat—I implore you to listen to me—to pardon me!’

‘Pardon! despicable, detested wretch! never! by all that is——’

‘Hold, Constantia!’ he exclaimed, frantically starting from his kneeling posture; ‘swear not rashly! you know not what I would say! Adored of my soul, condemn me not unheard!’

‘What would you—what *dare* you offer in extenuation of your baseness?’ I demanded.

“Marriage!” he answered—‘lawful, honourable marriage! I will, by Heaven, make you my wife, if——’

‘If what?’ I impatiently interrupted, maddened at the idea of some degrading stipulation.

‘If you will consent,’ he faltered, fearfully,

“Oh! what unbounded absolute power the persuasive language of love has over the susceptible heart of woman! Sense,  
reason,



enchantress! she threw all her spells around him, and their magic power enthralled him completely. She heard his protestations of love with complacency and delight; he got introduced to her father, paid his addresses in proper form, and was received.

“As soon as the day for their union was decided on, he had the audacity to write a long and plausible letter to my father; it spoke of pretended pecuniary losses he had sustained, which incapacitated him from supporting me, as I had no fortune myself, in the splendour that the rank of his wife would demand. He next hinted at our degradation at the Spanish court; saying, that almost on that account alone, his marriage with me would be highly disapproved of by his family; stated their arguments against it, pleaded the absolute necessity of yielding to them, regretted the alteration of his circumstances—for *my* sake regretted it! (abominable hypocrite!) and ended by declaring that, in complying with the wishes of his friends,

friends, which he dared not disobey, he inflicted a severe penalty on himself; but he must break off all acquaintance with us, and must behold me no more!

“ I will not attempt a description of what my feelings then were—my wounded pride, or of the tremendous indignation of my father and brother. The former condescended to reply to his letter, but it was such a reply as none could have wished for; it pictured him to himself as he was—an odious, unprincipled monster, who ought to be driven from all human society into never-ending disgrace and ignominy. Not content with this, my brother, who was of a temper ardent and impetuous, wrote him a challenge, on the eve of the day that was to have been his bridal one; it was accepted—on the ensuing morning they fought, and Manfred fell.

“ The laws of the country awarded the punishment of death to the survivor in a duel, and immediate flight was the only alternative by which my brother could  
preserve

preserve his life. He prepared, without delay, to quit the kingdom for ever, and bade us a solemn and affecting farewell; but he was pursued, and ere he reached the frontiers, taken, and conveyed before the officers of justice, who issued his death-warrant in twelve hours afterwards. The terrible sentence was forthwith put into execution. Our cup of misery now indeed was full—the few who had hitherto even slightly noticed us, deserted us altogether, owing to this additional stigma—our disgrace was complete.

“ Frederique had been the darling of my father, who, in a few days after his son’s death, began to droop—he gradually sunk, and ere five weeks more elapsed, he was numbered with the dead.

“ My broken-hearted mother did not long outlive them; persecution and misfortune had entirely worn out her patient spirit; she sickened, and soon followed them to the tomb, leaving me deserted and alone, in a wicked world, without a protector

protector or a friend—without a human being on whom I had a single claim, except from compassion—from charity! and experience very soon taught me that these were but slender ones amongst the rich and great.

“ I, who in the days when in the lap of prosperity, fortune, and luxury, had been smiled on, caressed, and flattered, by fawning, crouching sycophants, now that I was poor, unfortunated, and friendless, was shunned, spurned, despised by all. I saw the world in its true colours—I developed the natural character of mankind, and from my soul I hated it; for it was all of black duplicity, villainy, and ingratitude, that hell ever invented, and I resolved to quit it for ever. A monastic life was my resource; I became an inmate of this holy edifice, where, after the usual term of the noviciate, I took the veil, and have ever since devoted myself to Heaven.”

Her voice assumed so much of the pathetic



secret, on which she deemed so much of her future tranquillity dependent.

Apparently grateful for her confidence, and satisfied with this account, Constantia now turned their conversation on topics less gloomy; endeavouring, by every means, to ingratiate herself with her artless companion.

This being the eve of the day appointed for holding the celebrated feast of the Annunciation, instead of the one on which other monasteries usually held it, was observed through the convent as a solemn fast, so that even had it not been the first day of our heroine's noviciate, she would have been obliged to abstain from food until after the evening service. Constantia was thus enabled to linger with Victoria longer than she could otherwise have done, without fear of being detected by the superior, who had command-  
ed.

ed her, on pain of heavy displeasure, not to quit her cell.

At length the hour for prayers drawing near, warned her of the danger of further delay; and after renewed assurances of friendship and confidence on both sides, she reluctantly withdrew for the present, to prepare to accompany the lady abbess and the rest of the sisterhood to vespers.

### CHAPTER III.

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Il semble toutefois que mon âme troublée
 Refuse cette joie, et s'en trouve accablée.
 Un moment donne au sort des visages divers ;
 Et dans ce grand bonheur je crains un grand revers.

CORNEILLE.

.....

————— Ere the bat-hath flown
 Its cloistered flight ; ere to black Hecate's summons
 The shard-born beetle, with its drowsy hum,
 Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
 A deed of dreadful note. SHAKESPEARE.

THE convent clock had just struck seven as the vesper bell commenced. Never had Victoria fasted so long, and now, faint and indisposed, from want of food, she entreated that her presence at the chapel might, for that evening, be dispensed with.

This

This request the abbess did not think it exactly advisable to refuse; but it was complied with on the specified condition that it should never, unless in a case of absolute urgency, be repeated. To such consent the superior added also her permission for our young novice to leave her cell, and, as an extraordinary indulgence, to spend the remainder of the evening in the parlour—a permission which the latter gladly availed herself of.

When again left in solitude, a train of melancholy reflections returned; a sort of nervous agitation stole over her imperceptibly, and a tear trickled slowly and involuntarily down her pale cheek, to the memory of friends dear to her affections, whom she had fled from, to come amongst strangers, whose dispositions were unamiable, and whose manners to her were already so chilling and unkind.

In the midst of these sad thoughts, a
E 3 full

full peal of the organ burst upon her ear, accompanied by the exquisite voices of the nuns chanting the praises of the Deity.

Music was ever a rich and delicious feast to Victoria's senses, but the sublime melody of the sacred song created such pure, such delightful feelings in her bosom, as no other sounds ever inspired; and she now listened enraptured to the beautiful anthem, on whose every swell and cadence she hung with profound attention. —“These,” thought she, “these are the strains that raise the soul to heaven, and lift the ethereal essence of our being to the Divinity. Surely, if ever to mortal was given a foretaste of celestial joys, it must be in such moments as this, when all the harmony of heaven is breathed around.”

She presently forgot all her sorrows, and even when the organ's vibrations were no longer

longer heard on the air, they yet lingered on her imagination, until the whole service was over, and the return of the lady abbess disturbed her reverie.

“ Well, child,” asked the latter, “ how have you employed yourself since?” and gazing more intently at her, “ the traces of tears are on your cheek ; you have been weeping. Alas ! I fear me much that unhallowed thoughts still intrude on you, stealing your soul from Heaven. Is it not so ?”

“ Forgive me, lady,” said Victoria, pensively ; “ I own a tear, one little tear, ran lightly down my cheek—it was to the memory of days gone by. But I will weep no more.”

The voice and appearance of the abbess assumed a severity that made our poor heroine tremble internally for what they might hereafter be.—“ It were better, daughter,” said she, folding her arms across, and striding with dignity up to

her seat, "it were better had you mingled your vespers with ours, and joined our holy choir, than remain here, tainting the air of such a sacred spot with tears and sighs profane."

"Oh, lady, do not thus upbraid me. Have I not, kneeling at the altar, promised to consecrate my life beneath this roof to things divine? Here, in cloistered seclusion, I may, for many a long—long year, expiate that solitary tear."

"True, my daughter," said Stephania, in a gentler tone, "you *have* promised this, and for the present you are forgiven; but beware of offending in like manner again."

"Alas!" said Victoria to herself, "if this tyrant woman holds even our tears as offences, who here shall be safe from punishment, from cruelty and oppression? None, none indeed, under the dominion of the merciless Stephania."

Forgetful of the calm dignity and respect

pect she usually observed in presence of the haughty superior, Constantia now rushed in, and impetuously flung herself on a seat: her respiration was short and hurried, as if her body and soul were parting; a flush of deepest crimson, and a deadly paleness, alternately dyed her cheeks, and she trembled from head to foot with some violent emotion.

“Heaven preserve us, child!” ejaculated the terrified abbess, crossing herself, “what is the matter?—what are you labouring to say?”

After a tremendous struggle, Constantia gained the power of articulation.

“What is it you would say, child?” again demanded the abbess.

“Oh, lady, lady, that which my lips almost refuse to utter. I shudder as I tell it, and the very flesh seems starting with

horror from my bones. Jesu be our preserver! There is at our gates—a *man!*”

“A man!” reiterated Stephania, her shrivelled brow contracting with surprise and indignation, “a man, said you, daughter? For what unrighteous purpose hath a man, or any thing wearing the form of male, dared to approach so near us, or within our hallowed precincts?”

“As yet I know not, holy mother. He said his business was with our novice, Donna Clara de Manzilla.”

“With *me?*” cried Victoria, in a voice of tumultuous agitation, scarcely less than the nun’s. “Am I betrayed? Speak! speak! Who is he? Whence does he come? What is his rank?”

“Betrayed!” echoed the abbess, fixing her deep-searching eye upon her. “Daughter, daughter, what mean you? Beware how you attempt to deceive me!”

“Oh, I know not what I mean: my thoughts are all anarchy and confusion,
Tell

Tell me, tell me, sister Constantia, who it is would speak to me?"

"I scarcely saw him," answered the latter; "but, closely veiled, I ventured to interrogate him, and entrusting this miniature into my hands, he begged I would faithfully deliver it to you. You will, of course, know these features?" at the same moment producing it from a paper in which it was wrapped, she presented our trembling heroine with the portrait of De Willenberg.

The sudden sight of it was too much for her; joy, surprise, conviction, overpowered her; all her faculties at once gave way, and shrieking out — "Mysterious God, he lives!" she fell fainting at the feet of the superior.

"Whose is this miniature?" demanded Stephania, snatching it from Victoria's nerveless grasp, and transferring her furious looks to the nun. "Tell me instantly, daughter, whom does it represent? Withhold the truth at thy peril!"

“ He announced himself as her brother, whom rumour reported to have fallen in one of the late battles for his country. He is not five years her elder, and the resemblance of their features confirms his assertion. But what shall I fetch, lady, to recover her from her swoon ?”

“ Some water,” answered the unfeeling Stephania. “ Be that swoon death’s messenger to her, ere I behold a man’s unhal-
lowed foot within our walls !”

Before Constantia returned with the water, Victoria slowly began to revive, and the first sound that her lips uttered was—“ My Theodore lives !”

Scarcely waiting until she was able to reply, the abbess impatiently assailed her with questions.—“ Tell me,” she sternly said, “ tell me truly, I charge you, Clara de Manzilla, what passion was it overcame you thus ? If joy, whence did it arise ? Was it merely the feeling of a fond sister, or that hideous thing the world calls love ? Answer me truly, as you hope for
mercy !

mercy ! To whom belongs this portrait ?”

“ To my brother,” Victoria promptly replied, at once comprehending from her words that Theodore had introduced himself as such. “ To a dear and valued brother—I pray you give it, and let me hasten to him.”

“ No, no, child, that must not be ; such baubles ill befit your holy calling. Nor must you now hold converse with a man. Take this hence, Constantia,” she rejoined, at the moment the latter entered, carrying a glass of water ; “ take it back to him, and say that sister Clara cannot see him.”

“ Hold ! unfeeling, inhuman woman !” cried Victoria, endeavouring to arrest her arm, as she extended the portrait to Constantia. Frenzy was in her looks, and the tears showered from her eyes. “ Nay, for the love of Heaven, do not so ! I must—I will fly to my Theodore ! Your cruelty would drive me mad. Resign it. Give me the picture !” and with desperate force she wrested it from her. “ Now, now,

now, fiend! who dares prevent my seeing him? Conduct me to him!"

"*I* dare and *will* prevent you," said the abbess.

"In pity, dear lady, let her see him!" entreated Constantia; "opposition may render her desperate."

"I will see this person myself then," said Stephania, after some hesitation, for she really dreaded that further opposition *would* be productive of the effect the nun suggested; "and if no evil design hath led him hither, I will, for once, order him to be admitted to our little waiting-room. There she shall have my gracious permission to see him," and with haughty dignity she walked out.

Our heroine could hardly impose the necessary restraint upon her feelings in presence of Constantia, who seemed agitated with impatience to say something.

No less painful to Victoria was the necessity

cessity of silence; she felt as if she required more than woman's strength to bear her up against such a tide of joy as Theodore's presence would assuredly overwhelm her in. She saw that the nun was eager to make some communication, or to offer some opinion, and she would have asked her a thousand questions concerning him, could she have done so with safety or prudence.

Constantia, however, as if reading her wishes in her expressive countenance, when the abbess's receding steps were no longer heard, quitted her chair, and seated herself on a couch close beside her.—“Now, senora,” she asked, with a look of self-approbation, “did I not truly describe this woman what she is—a cruel bigoted tyrant?”

“Would that she merited not such a character! but to me she has indeed been unkind. Surely the mere presence of a
man,

man, and my brother too, cannot contaminate the place, were it ten times more sacred than it is.”

“ *A man's presence!*” repeated the nun, with a sarcastic sneer. “ The vile hypocrite ! if it *could* do so, she would have poisoned the whole place with contamination, and doomed us all long ago to perdition, if she dared. *A man's presence!* For sake of her wicked soul, it is seldom Heaven's will that a man should venture near the abode that contains her.”

Victoria was sensibly shocked and disgusted at this speech, which shewed the abbess's depravity, and Constantia's rancorous hatred; but her thoughts dwelt not long upon them—Theodore was their first, their dearest object; to see him, to hear the voice of her beloved once more, after the anguish of believing him dead, assassinated, a joy so totally unexpected, was, for a while, hardly credible, and she clasped

clasped the picture with energy to her bosom, as if yet doubting that the original could be in existence.

“ It is indeed a noble, a beautiful countenance,” observed Constantia, contriving to get another glimpse of the miniature ; “ and I do not wonder, senora, at your affectionate caresses. He *says* he is your brother, who was falsely reported to have been slain.”

“ Says! and who—who else could you have suspected, that is, supposed him to be?” inquired the alarmed Victoria, tremulously. “ Think you that he is *not* my brother?”

“ I may be wrong, dear Clara, but strange fancies sometimes will take hold of us; and—and—I—(it was a silly thought) I took him, at the moment, for—your lover.”

“ Hush! as you hope for heaven, utter not such fancies!” cried Victoria, still more terrified, and with such agitation as instantly

stantly betrayed the truth. "Say not—think not so. *He* my lover! Make not such idle speeches, I conjure you."

"Well, well, pardon the supposition; it *was* a strange one, I confess; yet, were he such, I could perhaps have assisted you to——"

"Elope with him from hence," she would have added, but Victoria's acuteness quickly supplied what she had left unsaid.

For the first time the possibility of effecting her escape now crossed her mind, and she hesitated whether she should or should not confide the whole secret to her; for she plainly saw that it was already suspected. To disclose it might perhaps be to make a confidant of an unsafe and treacherous person, to reveal her real story to one who might not scruple to betray her to the abbess, who would assuredly punish her dissimulation; but, on the other hand, to withhold it might, by im-
plying

plying a doubt of her fidelity, give umbrage to Constantia, who, from that cause alone, might reveal her suspicions, and thus produce the same consequences; so that, altogether, she resolved to make a virtue of necessity, and appealing to her humanity and her assistance, communicate the whole.

“What said my brother to make you think thus?”

“Ah, senora, well I know, from your manner, that he is *not* your brother: you feared to whisper this to me, viewing me, as you did, with an eye of suspicion, thinking I would betray you to the abbess. Betray you to *her*! No, were I ever inclined to prove a traitor, racks and torments should not compel me to deliver you up to the malice of that infernal demon.”

“Beware, good sister,” cautioned Victoria; “she may, perchance, be within hearing.”

“Then

“ Then if she *is*, she is one of the listeners that never hear good of themselves. She would listen, only she well knows that I could hear her footsteps. But let us speak low. Now tell me, my friend, ingenuously, is not my conjecture right, relative to this young cavalier?”

“ It is, it is,” replied Victoria, in a hurried voice. “ All is known to you. I am now in your power; but, oh, if you would not see me doomed to tortures, horrible tortures, by the abbess, I beseech you reveal it not.”

“ My bosom shall be the grave of your secret; there shall it remain in hallowed, undisturbed repose for ever. Now hear me.”

“ Hark! some one approaches,” interrupted Victoria.

“ It is the abbess. Not a word—not a word. Anon I will tell you how I would serve you.”

With the same stateliness and gravity Stephania again made her appearance.—

“ I have

“ I have seen this stranger,” said she, “ and these holy lips have, for the first time for many a year, held conference with a male. I stood within the grate, and questioned him, and finding him to be thy relative, Clara de Manzilla, I have given orders for his admittance into the boarders’ waiting-room, where you may see him; but not alone. Let five minutes be the extent of your interview with him. Constantia, do you attend her thither.”

As eagerly as the dread of incurring suspicion would permit, she flew to the waiting-room, followed by Constantia, who endeavoured all the way to inspire her with the most implicit confidence.

Trembling and agitated, she scarcely knew why, unless at the possibility of being disappointed, our heroine stood for some moments at the door, ere she had courage to enter; but her companion re-
minding

minding her of the loss of time, she at length went in, and there indeed beheld Theodore himself, fondly, impatiently waiting for her.

The first impulse of both would have been to fly instantly into each other's arms, but a mutual feeling of diffidence, and the presence of Constantia, restrained them. Their countenances, glowing with joy, fully spoke what their lips timidly refused to utter—expressions of ardent affection and rapture. His eyes sparkled with more than their usual brilliancy, as he rushed forward and seized her extended hand, which he pressed with fervour to his lips.

A sweet seraphic smile of transport shone over Victoria's face, emblematic of her pure heart, which had not learned to disguise its feelings.—“My Theodore,” she exclaimed, her bright eyes beaming upon his, “Heaven be praised you are
safe,

safe, and returned to bless my sight once more, after *such* a separation! Oh, it was dreadful! dreadful!”

“ Dreadful indeed, in the probability of its being a lasting one! But my life, my soul, I *am* come back to you, and——”

“ We will part no more,” added Victoria.

The voice of a consoling angel to suffering mortal could not have been more delightful than these words were to De Willenberg. He could no longer control his eagerness to press her to his bosom, and he did so.—“ What says my love?” cried he. “ Not part? Again, my Victoria, say so; tell me, assure me, that my fears have deceived me, that you have uttered no rash vow, or——”

Now did the direful, the harrowing recollection of her oath rush upon her—at the altar had she vowed to take the veil, to become a cloistered nun, and return to
the

the world no more. And was not such an oath irrevocable ?

Almost convulsed at the remembrance of it, she wildly tore herself from his hold. —“ No more ! no more, I pray you !” she exclaimed. “ Drive me not frantic ! Hurl me from you, Theodore ! Dash, dash me from you, as you would a serpent, whose poisonous fangs clung to you ! I have been false—false as the tempter ! I *have* made a vow, a terrible, a desperate vow, to take the veil ! But you were gone, I thought, for ever. Oh, pity me, Heaven !”

“ Say rather you have vowed to take your life, to plunge a dagger to the very hilt deep in your breast, to stretch yourself before me, a bleeding corpse—say any thing but that, and still I can be tranquil.”

“ Would to God that I might unsay it ! but it is too true.”

“ This

“This is the abbess’s doing,” said he, gazing madly round, as if to blast her with a look, if she were present. His eye fell on the tall figure of Constantia, who was standing at a distance, enveloped in a long black veil. “Who is she that stands yonder?” he demanded. “One of hell’s missionaries, those dark fiends who have tried to snatch you from me? Hence! Avaunt! I will disappoint your malice! Hence! thou thing infernal!”

“No, no, my love, do not condemn *her*,” interposed Victoria, somewhat recovering herself. “*She* would befriend me.”

“Ay,” muttered the angry nun, “fiend, or whatever thing I am, I have it in my power to do that.”

A transition, almost instantaneous, from despair to hope, was visible in De Willenberg.—“Thou ministering angel! how, how befriend her? Say, what is it you would do? Any thing to serve her, and

gold shall reward you here, and Heaven hereafter.”

“Nay, senor, moderate your transport,” advised Constantia, “and listen coolly. I want not gold. I would, of my own will, set this lady free—aid her to escape.”

“May the Divinity pour his blessings on you! Victoria, hear you this? She will assist my plan. Instantly prepare to fly hence with me, to quit this detestable place for ever.”

“My vow, De Willenberg! my vow, it is registered above. Think what a crime it would be, in the eye of Heaven, to violate it. Any thing but that would I do for you; any peril else would I this moment encounter. But oh, reflect upon my vow! At the altar I pledged it. I dare not break it. I dare not, cannot go hence.”

“I tell you, Victoria, no oath extorted ever can be binding; against such a vow Heaven hath closed its ear, and the recording

cording angel would never sully the sacred page with it, even were it heard above."

"This is all the work of Stephania's treachery and bigotry," asserted Constantia; "the unfeeling abbess has done this; she, by her sophistry and wily arts, seduced her from you; she it was who filled her pure mind with maxims and superstitions that the Deity never did sanction—never will. Her oath, I maintain, is *not* binding; it was basely wrested from her, and she is as free as if she had never pronounced it."

"Oh, would that I could be thus easily absolved!"

"You *are* absolved," said Theodore. "But can you possibly love me yet, and hesitate? Have these flinty walls, and ice-cold virgins, frozen up every avenue to your once warm and affectionate heart? Hath the abbess, whose features, like black night, throw their sad gloom around these

dismal cells—hath she also wrested from you that love for me you once fondly owned? Ungrateful, cruel girl! is it for this I have braved so much?”

“Term me not ungrateful—I merit it not, Theodore. This is the first ungentle word you have ever breathed to me.”

“Be it the last! It was uttered in the warmth of my love. Would you, my Victoria, would you forsake me? But do so if you will. I am now poor and deserted indeed!”

To overcome her scruples Victoria found a difficult task; but to resist Theodore’s eloquence would have been infinitely more so—all irresolution vanished.—“When I forsake you, De Willenberg,” said she, “may that Power who has supported me in my hours of anguish forsake me! Suggest the means, and this very hour shall be my last here. I *will* fly with you.”

“Now am I blessed, most truly!” said he, again straining her to his bosom; “and
now,

now, good sister, (to Constantia), for your promised aid. The next hour must not behold my Victoria here."

"Beware, senor! we must be circumspect in this business. She could not now escape. On every side are those who watch your footsteps."

"Name the moment then when we may go hence in safety."

"Hear my plan, and act accordingly. Beyond the northern gate, adjoining the village, a sentinel is stationed, to guard the convent from profane intruders, an old decrepid wretch, whose poverty is the warrant of his services to you—a few pieces of silver will corrupt him, and buy him completely over to your interest. You must depart forthwith, and alone; hasten round to the sentinel, give him the bribe, and secure his secrecy; that done, you must withdraw, for a while, to some convenient place in the neighbourhood, until the clock shall strike the hour of ten. All

F 3

within

within the convent but our two selves will then be wrapt in deep sleep. I will steal softly to sister Clara's cell, and conduct her safely through the inner gate, the key of which I have now in my possession. When I have led her past that barrier, you, senor, must do the rest."

"In one word, one breath, tell me *all* I must do."

"At ten o'clock be on your post, beside the northern gate, the key of which the superior never entrusts to any body. Be provided with a ladder of strong rope, and at the instant you hear the clock's last stroke, fling it over without delay; your lover shall ascend it. When she gains the top, assist her to descend, and bear her off."

"A carriage shall be in readiness," said De Willenberg.

"By no means, senor; it must be done with the most cautious privacy and silence. The noise of a carriage would betray

tray us all three, besides the unfortunate guard, to destruction. You must come there on foot, and unattended."

"It is wisely suggested; it would be dangerous, and therefore all shall be as you advise. I dare not offer you pecuniary recompence, for yours is a benevolence above all reward on earth; but while I live, I shall ever remember you with gratitude; and I feel assured, Victoria, so will you."

"Yes, with the truest gratitude my heart can feel."

"One condition yet remains, senior. You must both solemnly swear to me, that no circumstances, which chance or design may ever throw you in the way of, shall force from your lips any part of this conversation, or a tittle of this our project; in a word, that even tortures shall never compel you to betray me."

"May those tortures fall tenfold on us! tortures worse than mortal can imagine, if ever we do!" cried the impetuous De

Willenberg, snatching the crucifix she held towards him, and kissing it. "What says my Victoria?"

"Amen!" replied the latter.

"Amen! amen!" reiterated the nun, in a voice deep and awful. "I am satisfied."

They had almost forgotten the necessity of separating for the present, until Constantia suggested, that if they did not do so, the superior would probably come to know what was the cause of their delay. Enjoining him to be punctual, as the guard would, she said, be relieved at a quarter past ten, and promising that she and Victoria would be equally so, she drew her veil closely over her face, to avoid the possibility of an unhallowed gaze from Theodore, and calling to Garcia, the portress, to open the gates, and permit him to repass, she suffered him again to imprint a kiss on Victoria's hand, and then fearfully conducted her back to
the

the abbess's apartment, for they had already overstaid the given time.

“ You have disobeyed my orders,” observed Stephania, frowning, as they entered, “ and must never expect such an indulgence again. Clara de Manzilla, do you thus presume to treat the superior of this convent with disrespect already? Dare to repeat such conduct, and you fast upon hard biscuits and water for a month.”

If any thing was yet wanting to justify our heroine in the step she was about to take, this fresh display of Stephania's character would have effectually fixed her determination. Such a woman she now could not but secretly despise and abhor; every hour her presence was becoming more and more disgusting, and she wished sincerely to be relieved from it for ever.

After a scanty supper, Constantia was ordered to conduct the novices to their
F 5 respective

respective cells, and then to retire, with the rest of the nuns, to the dormitory for the night.

Gladly did Victoria wish the abbess a good-night, trusting that she had done so for the last time; and Constantia's remarks, when they quitted the parlour, were not at all calculated to remove her prejudices. —“ Surely, senora,” said she, “ you cannot, after all this, feel a moment's compunction; you cannot now hesitate to quit the society of such a monster? Hesitate! No, to do so were a crime. She would soon pollute your young mind with her abominable bigotries, and drag you headlong to eternal ruin. From my very soul I hate and detest her; and even did nothing but that hatred urge me on to this undertaking, I would set you free.”

“ But how,” asked Victoria, alarmed for the nun's own safety, “ how will you account for my absence? She will assuredly suspect you of being the abettor
of

of my flight, and her heaviest wrath and vengeance will, in consequence, fall upon you. What are you to say when I am missed, and you questioned about me, to-morrow?"

"Give not that a moment's consideration; leave it entirely to me. I will manage to deceive her. Nor do I fear aught from *her* wrath or vengeance. *She* is deeply in *my* power already, and dare not shew her impotent rage to me."

They had by this time been joined by a train of the novices, and could communicate no farther, until they reached the door of Victoria's cell, where she had merely an opportunity to whisper—"Remain here for a while contented. At a quarter before ten expect me. Be ready. Till then farewell!"

Our heroine, now left to herself, had subjects sufficient to keep all her thoughts awake.—"Every succeeding hour," said she, mentally, "proves how variable is

the scene of human existence, how slender the thread on which our hopes, our fears, our joys, and our sorrows hang—a breath can snap it asunder. It was but this morning I fancied myself devoted for the remainder of my life to solitude and sorrow, eagerly looking forward to the period when I might conceal that sorrow beneath the monastic veil; it was but this morning I believed my beloved Theodore numbered with the dead—the victim of treachery and murder. Robbed of him, life had for me no charms. A convent was my resource, the last place on earth I should else have chosen to abide in. What a change has one short hour produced! My apprehensions, sad and fearful, are now vanished; and my heart, which so lately drooped in silent sorrow and despair, now sits on the very pinnacle of hope and joy.”

Her heart indeed was almost at her lips, and fluttered with the delight that beamed

ed over her beautiful countenance. She should again behold her adored father, again be clasped in his fond embrace, and part from him no more. She should hear him pronounce a willing and affectionate pardon for the transgression (if such it was) into which her love for Theodore had led her; she should, in fine, be happy herself, and see happiness diffused around her; for surely now nothing more would separate them.

Such is human foresight! Thus is it limited! How infinite is the wisdom of that Omnipotence who has thus bounded our view, and denied to mortal that foreknowledge of good and evil, which, instead of the blessing, the capriciousness of our nature sometimes renders us desirous of, would prove our greatest earthly punishment! Could we anticipate the various ills and vicissitudes with which fate has marked our path through life, how insignificant would the contrast make the
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the good appear to us! how discontented and miserable should we all be! How fortunate then is the state of ignorance that so many deplore, and what a debt of gratitude do we not owe to a Being so considerate, so mindful of the tranquillity of his creatures!

With a heart equally light, Theodore was, in the meantime, making arrangements for the liberation of his beloved, with all the zeal and alacrity prompted by his warm affection for her, and his detestation of a life of voluntary penance and seclusion.

Having frequently heard of the notoriously-rigid sanctity of the Monastery of St. Agnes, where the presence of man was said to be shunned almost as scrupulously as contagion, he had entertained some doubts as to the probability of his being admitted there under any pretence. But he knew, that should Conrad

rad be also seen accompanying him, an absolute denial would be given, which no arguments would be sufficiently powerful to make the saintly community retract. With this conviction, he had wisely left his servant in the neighbouring village, taking care of the horses, and after much rhetoric, and many arguments with Garcia, and the most irresistible of all arguments, a bribe, he had persuaded her to carry in his message.

On quitting Victoria, his first care was to repair cautiously to the northern wall, where, as Constantia had told him, the sentinel was pacing to and fro on his post. His figure and countenance exactly answered her description of him. Avarice and treachery were depicted on his face in savage characters; and De Willenberg saw, at the first glance, that he could not have found one better suited to his purpose.

This

This opinion was fully justified on his accosting him. The mercenary hireling eagerly grasped the golden bribe, and his eyes glistening with delight, and glutting on the sight of it, he heard just as much of the plan as it was indispensable that she should know, and vowed the strictest secrecy and fidelity.

Having secured, as he hoped, the acquiescence of this man, he hastened to communicate to his faithful Conrad the success of his visit, and the project for Victoria's deliverance.

The joy of this attached servant was almost unbounded. He reckoned as certain his master's immediate marriage with the one who had made such a sacrifice to her affection for him, and his own, soon afterwards, with the smiling Barbara.

Conrad urged him to retire to bed, and enjoy an hour's repose, which he was
much

much in need of, previous to his appointment, but he would not listen to such a proposal. With such an undertaking on his mind, and until its accomplishment, he knew it was impossible for him to sleep, and he preferred even the misery of counting the tedious minutes by which time crept on, until he heard the clock proclaim a quarter before ten. Never had music been more delicious to his ear than this signal for his departure. His heart beat, and his face was flushed with tumultuous joy, which rose at first to such a pitch, that Conrad warned him of the danger not only of a total failure, but of his being seized in the attempt, and made a prisoner, if he did not go perfectly cool and collected.

He was thus soon reasoned into his natural calmness; and having, in a manner least likely to create suspicion, ordered a carriage to be in readiness, to forward himself and his servant on a journey of
importance,

importance, under pretence of making preparations for it, accompanied by Conrad, whose assistance would be necessary, he set out for the monastery.

The night was gloomy, and the moon, as if to favour their undertaking, had veiled herself beneath a train of clouds. Conrad, who carried the rope-ladder, advanced on tiptoe to reconnoitre and see if all was safe. He saw none but a solitary sentinel in his box, with his musket by his side, nor heard any thing but a dreary breeze of wind, that shook the branches of the surrounding trees.

Theodore presently joined him, and looking towards the sentry-box, how great, how dreadful was his astonishment and dismay, on perceiving that the guard had been changed, and the present one a perfect stranger to himself and to his plan!

What was now to be done against an
obstacle

obstacle for which he was so wholly unprepared? how was it to be overcome? The first idea that took possession of him was, that it was an act of treachery on the part of Constantia. Such a possibility enraged him almost to madness, and he would have inevitably betrayed himself, had not Conrad represented to him how unlikely it was that she should have been influenced by treachery, or any other unworthy motive, against one whom she knew not, especially when her aid had been voluntarily proffered.

This argument he could not reject; but be it what it might, the present was not a time for conjecture—it was necessary to be prompt and resolute in whatever was to be done, for their own and Victoria's safety was involved in the event.

Conrad suggested that this man was probably as sordid, and as accessible, by means of a bribe, as the other, and advised him to
make

make the experiment, which he was about to do, when, advancing for the purpose, he saw that the sentinel's back was turned towards him, and that neither himself nor his attendant had been seen by him. A thought just then struck him, that should the man continue in that posture, they might, with silence and caution, effect Victoria's liberation entirely without his knowledge.

Ere they had determined on this, the clock struck the momentous signal. The tenth sound had just issued from it, when De Willenberg, impetuously snatching the rope from Conrad's hand, darted over, and flung one end of it across the wall, beside the gates, and secured the other outside.

Suspense, fearful and agonizing, for a moment almost unnerved him, and he trembled, as if with the consciousness of some enormous guilt; but almost in the
next

next instant, Victoria's appearing on the summit of the wall reassured him.

“Once more, my Theodore, I am yours,” cried she, in a tone of wild joy, that thrilled to his very heart.

Their mutual joy was however but momentary. The sentinel's ear caught the expression. Suddenly turning round, he saw what was going forward—a novice attempting to escape.—“Impious wretches! be this your punishment!” he roared, in a voice of thunder; and just as Victoria was in the act of descending, he presented his musket, fired, and she fell, with a loud scream, to the ground.

Theodore gave no time to reflection. She had fallen, to all appearance, lifeless, and his brain seemed burning with the fire of madness, fury, and vengeance. Glaring with these frightful passions, he flew towards the guard.—“Fiend! minister of hell!” he vociferated, “man or devil! I will have revenge; and this—this shall

shall send thy recreant soul to its black master, Lucifer, to expiate thy deed in flames eternal!"

This ebullition of frenzy had scarcely burst from his foaming lips, when, unsheathing his sword, he plunged it into the sentinel's side, who, with a loud and harrowing groan, fell to the earth, prostrate, and covered with torrents of blood.

While yet his screams resounded through the air, the convent gates were flung open, and the demon of this sanguinary scene of horror suddenly stood before them—the nun Constantia, who, with a violent motion, dashing aside her veil, discovered to the petrified De Willenberg the fiend-like features of Maddeline de Klopstock.

All hell seemed pictured in her face; her voice was the exulting yell of Lucifer, as her flaming and meteor eyes glared and gluttled on the vengeance she had wrought.

wrought.—“Revenge, revenge is mine!” she shrieked, in frantic joy. “At length it comes pealing on my ears from the four winds of heaven. Revenge, great and terrible, worthy of my wrongs! revenge worthy of the scorned insulted Maddeline! Villain, dost thou know me now? I am the woman you dared to spurn; but oh, tremble, tremble, wretch! sink, if thou canst, into the caverns of the earth, from my fury. I—I have done this—I planned your ruin; I made you commit this sacrilege! and your lives will be the forfeit! My blood curdles with hatred thick and dreadful! All the powers infernal shall aid my vengeance! It shall be great—great and tremendous! Mad with my wrongs, I will hurl destruction on you!”

Saying this, she screamed out a hideous laugh of triumph, that would have made the most abandoned mortal shudder with horror, and shutting the gates with a
loud

loud noise, she left De Willenberg in a state that no tongue or pen can well describe.

CHAP.

scanty wages of a weekly labourer, Bernardine de Klopstock contrived, by dint of strict parsimony and frugality, to save a sum, trifling in itself, but sufficient to enable them to purchase a little shop, together with the necessary commodities to carry on the business of a dealer in groceries, &c. In addition to this, it had pleased Heaven to bless them with a daughter—an event which they joyfully hailed as an omen of its special favour, and certainly indicative to them of future wealth and prosperity—an indication which was fulfilled to the very letter.

The simple Bernardine and his wife, being of mean extraction, were totally illiterate, and moreover, as homely—not to say ugly, a couple, as could be found within twenty leagues of them; but, by some of the rules of contrariety, it happened that the little Maddeline was a beautiful child, and promised to grow up in great personal loveliness. This was another cause of exultation

ultation and delight to the happy parents, who having been long accustomed to see only their own plain unadorned faces, took it for granted, in their happy ignorance, that nature intended she should one day move in a higher rank, not for a moment presuming to think that there ever was such a *lusus naturæ* as an ugly woman of distinction.

In consequence of this prepossession, Maddeline was sent to school, in order to acquire all the graces and accomplishments befitting an intended lady of quality. For this object their till was almost drained, and the hope of the family was sent off—not in the style of a grocer's daughter, but that of a modern boarding-school Miss—all airs, ignorance, frippery, and show, to a distant seminary.

There she learned not, indeed, the accomplishments befitting a *lady*, but what perhaps was the same thing, those that she

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thought

thought befitted herself, like many amiable sprigs of gentility at the present day—impudence, insolence, vanity, and ill-nature. She had early learned to appreciate the beauty of her face and person, which was certainly striking, and which she always took care to display to the utmost advantage, especially if there happened to be one so hardy as to rival her; and woe to the one who did! To the younger girls she was a mischievous tyrant, whenever she could be so without danger to herself; and they not unfrequently amused themselves with jokes and raillery at her expence. She in her turn, however, indulged them with a few practical jokes, such as now and then a harmless pinch or two, as playfully, but as effectually as she could, which was sometimes followed by a squall, by no means playful or good-humoured; but oftener her victim suffered in silence, from the fear of such another instance of her amiable vivacity; in consequence she was by *them* hated and

and dreaded, and by girls of her own, and more advanced age, despised, for her innate disposition was vicious and depraved.

All this time she had totally neglected her studies on every literary subject; and when, in her eighteenth year, she made her discreditable exit from school, any others but her ignorant and infatuated parents would have regretted having sent her there at all. But their folly and prejudices were not yet at an end. By way of completing her *education*, they sent her to board in a monastery, the very seat of duplicity and superstition. In this genial atmosphere the noxious weeds that nature had implanted in her bosom, shot into full growth and bearing; the worst examples of bigotry and hypocrisy were daily before her, and those maxims and principles inculcated into her which afterwards proved her bane. She was there convinced that convents were in general far from being the abodes of real purity or religion.

After a few months' residence there, she was again summoned home, where she appeared to her delighted parents a model of perfection. Her beauty was generally talked of, and generally admired; and the name of Maddeline, the grocer's pretty daughter, was soon buzzed about by every tongue in the neighbourhood. Her vanity quickly had enough to feast upon, for she was not only praised, but courted, followed, and wooed, by a train of the handsomest of the other sex that Germany could boast; some wooing her for her beauty alone, and others, who more needed it, for her money and her beauty together; for by this time her father had, by perseverance and hard labour, realized a tolerable sum. On her return his profits were doubled and trebled; his shop was the first now in the village—resorted to by all; and going on at this rate, his coffers were very soon filled.

Amongst the most captivating of her
suits

suitors was Eugene, the son of baron Gesnel, who resided in a small castle on the acclivity of a mountain, that on one side bounded and overlooked the village. In face and person he was critically handsome—in manners fascinating and plausible; and Maddeline had not known him long before he made a complete conquest of her heart, and vows of love and constancy were interchanged between them. But, alas! to their union a fatal and insurmountable barrier was soon found to exist. Perceiving not at first that his views in thus addressing her were almost entirely of a mercenary nature, she encouraged him with all the warmth of affection she was capable of feeling; nor did she disguise that affection from her father or mother.

Their acquisition of immense wealth had, however, not rendered them disinterested in the choice of a partner for her future life, nor in their eyes could Eugene's rank at all compensate for his total want of for-

tune. His father, the baron, was endeavouring to maintain himself, his wife, a son (Eugene), and daughter, on a scanty annuity, which would have been hardly sufficient to support himself alone in a style suited to his station, and withal was so proverbially proud and haughty, as to render it certain that he would never consent to his son's marriage with the daughter of a plebeian, even should such a marriage bring him the wealth and splendour of an eastern monarch.

Under these untoward circumstances, the prudent Bernardine gave him a formal dismissal, and moreover commanded the weeping Maddeline never to see him more, and to discard him from her thoughts altogether. But to this peremptory mandate it was not at all the intention of her towering spirit to yield acquiescence; if her bosom *could* boast of a few virtues, filial obedience and reverence certainly did not rank the highest; and in spite of all their arguments,

arguments, and all their representations of his motives being more in favour of her fortune than of herself, she still continued to cherish his beloved image, and still, unknown to them, to encourage his hopes, and give him private meetings.

These purse-proud folks thought it now high time to cast off the ignominious appellation of "shopkeepers," and, like innumerable others that money raises in the world, to dub themselves "gentry," and live on their fortune. To do this with greater facility and credit to themselves, it was deemed expedient to quit for ever their native village, where every one knew what they were, and take up their residence in the interior of Poland, where it was not likely that they should ever be recognized. There were also other reasons for this arrangement. Maddeline had decidedly declared against every other suitor but Eugene, and from him, surrounded by pride and poverty as he was, they trusted

that variety and change of scene would in time effectually wean her.

Having disposed of their shop, stock, and fixtures, the necessary preparations were rapidly made for their journey; and Eugene being informed of it, contrived to obtain a parting interview with his beloved. Sighs, tears, and protestations of mutual and lasting affection, were the entertainments of this doleful meeting; and Madeline, to chase away all his doubts, and evince her amiable constancy and fidelity to him, gave him the praiseworthy assurance, that, as soon as her old father was laid comfortably under ground, which, in the course of nature, must be shortly, she should be mistress of the whole property, and would marry him immediately, either with or without the consent of her mother, should she survive. To Eugene this was a joyful promise, for he was, like her, happily blessed with an independent spirit, that had long since shaken off the yoke of parental

parental authority; and thus, confident of each other's love, they parted.

Another week brought our travellers to a beautiful residence, within a few miles of Warsaw, embellished with all the luxuries and comforts that money could procure; and here Bernardine de Klopstock, the *ci-devant* day-labourer, acquired the reputation of being the richest untitled individual in that part of the country.

This was a reputation he had gained by many a year of toil and drudgery, and he now determined to preserve it. From vast and successful speculations in trading vessels to many parts of India, his wealth and fame rapidly increased, until at length satiated with both, he threw off all the cares of business, and set himself down in "fat contented idleness" for the remainder of his life.

At a short distance from their villa, was
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that of M. De Willenberg, between whose family and theirs a close intimacy soon commenced, facilitated not a little on the part of the fickle Maddeline, who having once beheld the elegant Theodore, made up her mind, without hesitation, to become his wife, if ardent love, wealth, and stratagem, could make her such.

To this end she decked herself out for conquest, in beauty's sweetest smiles, and all its exterior fascinations, which, alas! were entirely disregarded and lost upon Theodore. No arts, no allurements, did she leave unemployed in this great business; but all—all failed, as did also his father's remonstrances and commands, as stated in our preceding pages. Still M. De Willenberg neither relinquished every hope himself, nor suffered Maddeline to do so; perseverance, they thought, might effect a great deal, and animated by this possibility, she *did* persevere with unabated diligence.

Now

Now that a new and more attractive object came in her way, she had in reality forgotten her former lover, Eugene, the one to whom she had vowed eternal faith; and while indulging her hopes relative to Theodore, Eugene himself appeared before her. He had clandestinely taken a journey to Poland, in order to convince himself whether she yet remained true to him, and, with all a lover's ingenuity, he contrived to meet her privately. Fatal hour! His expectations received their deathblow. She reproached him with his poverty, and his impudence in presuming to address a woman of her fortune; and finally commanded him never to intrude on her retirement again. This was treatment he was little prepared for; but whatever he might have thought of it, he kept to himself at present, and with all possible deference, and certainly very little gratitude, took his leave.

In a few days subsequent to this, her
father

father sent to M. De Willenberg to request a decision, one way or the other, of the negociation between them for their son and daughter; and again all *his* father's eloquence was exhausted on Theodore, in favour of Maddeline, but exhausted in vain. He decidedly protested against such a woman, and desired that such protest might forthwith be notified to her, to put a period at once to her hopes and importunities. It did indeed terminate them; but a dreadful termination it was. Her whole form shook with horrible rage; the madness of disappointment distended her eyes, which gleamed with the fires of vengeance, and terrible and vindictive were her resolves. In the face of Heaven this slighted woman swore that revenge she would have.

It was rumoured, about the same time, that some severe pecuniary losses had befallen the baron Gesnel, and left him almost in a state of actual penury, by which
his

his only daughter was reduced to the necessity of immuring herself for life in a convent.

This recalled to Maddeline's memory the discarded Eugene. She felt a spark of returning affection for him; and as well to relieve him from the difficulties that pressed upon him, as to shew her hatred and indifference to Theodore, she resolved, should any thing again tempt him to present himself, to renew her promises, and eventually give him her hand.

As if directed by instinct, he did reappear, and again became her suppliant, with every prospect of success. - He appeared enraptured at this change in her sentiments, and uttered innumerable expressions of gratitude, protesting that were the crown of Poland at his command, he would lay it at her feet.

Pleased and flattered by these assurances
of

of his unbounded attachment, she afforded him every opportunity of meeting her, unknown to her father or mother, who were not at all aware of his being in the same country with them, or the rapid progress he was making in regaining their daughter's heart.

His sister Stephania, a woman proud, haughty, and overbearing, had retired from a world she could no longer enjoy herself in, as soon as this direful change took place in her father's circumstances, and crossing into Poland, had entered the convent of St. Agnes, with the superior of which she was intimately acquainted; and Eugene, in one of his interviews with Maddeline, unfolded completely to her the character of a sister he had ever despised, informing her at the same time of Stephania's residence, and her chagrin at being obliged to seclude herself there.

To circumstances relative to his sister
and

and his parents, however, he confined his communications; he took care not to throw out the slightest intimation that he was at that very time in expectation of a lucrative appointment in India, which, by attention, would probably, in a few years, put much more in his pocket than a marriage with her could ever do, and contented himself with assuring her that the happiness of his whole life should be to devote himself entirely to her. But his intentions towards her were now of a far less honourable description than she apprehended.

It is an item in the doctrine of chances, that those events which seem the nearest, and are most desired by us, are often, by some strange and perverse circumstances, retarded or turned aside. Such was the case with Maddeline, whose love for her father was of such a *heavenly* nature, that she sincerely wished him a safe and speedy journey to the celestial regions, out of the
cares

cares of this wicked world — a journey which the old gentleman seemed at present by no means inclined to take. This was a woeful drawback to her expectations, and her impatience was not exceeded even by Eugene's, who sighed for the arrival of that blissful hour when he might make her his wife. Alas! that hour never came. Her ideas of propriety and decorum were far from being the most correct, and she did not scruple to admit her lover every night, and remain with him several hours in an alcove, at the remote end of a wood that shaded her father's house. To this alcove it was her custom to repair, by a private door, the key of which she usually kept, when all the other members of the family, totally unsuspecting of the dangerous intrigue she was thus carrying on, had long retired to bed.

The opportunity Eugene panted for now rapidly approached. Maddeline had slighted him once, and such an insult was never

never to be forgotten or forgiven by him; he had sworn vengeance, and satisfaction should be his, and the moment for it was at hand.

Their assignation one night had been for an earlier hour than usual, and, as if in opposition to it, her father and mother sat up long beyond their accustomed time of going to rest. In vain she threw out hints of the lateness of the hour—in vain the clock struck ten, eleven, twelve; the first hour of morning had nearly arrived when they withdrew, and, enraged at their delay, her vexation had several times nearly betrayed her. What would her lover think of such treatment, such delay?—What would he conclude, but that, from sudden caprice, she was again about to cast him off? To compensate him, however, for the length of time she had been obliged to make him wait, she thought she could bring him nothing more acceptable than a specimen of her father's choicest vidonia
and

and *lacrymæ Christi*. Accordingly, having procured a small basket to carry them in, the moment she found herself alone, she selected two of the best bottles, together with some fine fruits, and ascertaining that all was safe around her, she set out to meet her fate.

Exultation at the thought that the moment for the execution of his meditated crime was so near, beamed over the features of Eugene, as she entered the arbour. It was the exultation of a fiend, who had trepanned his hapless victim, but she saw it not; they met each other with the usual endearing salutations, and in extenuation of her having detained him so long, she presently displayed what she had brought, and what proved the agent of his dreadful purpose.

The wine being opened, he filled a bumper, and drank to her health and happiness; after which he insisted that she should accompany him in another. This she

she for some little time persisted in declining to do; but at length his entreaties and persuasions succeeded, and she swallowed the delicious draught—so delicious, that it required but little of his eloquence to prevail on her to repeat it. He took care to drink so cautiously himself as to retain the full possession of his senses, while at the same time he was sufficiently on his guard against attracting any particular notice from her in doing so.

The unfortunate Maddeline had not restricted herself to two glasses; and her profligate companion continued to ply her with the inebriating liquor, in furtherance of his diabolical design. His conversation grew by degrees bolder, warmer, and more licentious, than any he had ever yet ventured in her presence; but the copious libations of wine she had taken had totally blunted all sense of delicacy in her, and he went on unchecked and without restraint. Emboldened still more, he pressed his lips
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to hers ; they were warm and glowing, like her cheeks, with unhallowed fires. Flushed with wine, and intoxicated with his protestations and flatteries, she became his victim, and the villain triumphed in her ruin !

The moment of enjoyment past, he perceived the magnitude and atrocity of his crime, and looked forward to the consequences he had to dread, if he did not escape from them by immediate flight, which he at once resolved on. Not daring to wait until her returning senses should shew her the nature of her situation, he quitted the alcove, under the pretence of ascertaining whether she might withdraw unobserved to her apartment, and saying he would return in a few minutes ; but to the alcove, or to her, he returned no more. His resentment was satisfied ; vengeance was his, and without one pang of remorse for the sorrow, the disgrace, and the guilt he had heaped upon her, he fled
secretly

secretly to a far distant port, and embarked in three days afterwards for India, where he trusted he should be safe from punishment or retribution.

In the meantime, Maddeline, whose fame and peace were thus destroyed for ever, awoke, from the delirium of her guilty passion, to all the horrors the human mind can feel. She beheld herself deep sunk in vice and destruction—disgrace and infamy staring her in the face, while her lover, a perjured villain—the one who had seduced her to the lowest state of mortal degradation—had fled from her for ever!—"But, oh, ye powers of justice," cried she, as she knelt, alternately raising and bending her fiercely-rolling eyes, "and you, ye fiends, whose office it is to torture with your fires the soul of perjured man, will ye not aid me in my mighty revenge? Lend me—lend me your flaming stings, your every implement of vengeance, till with one fell sweep I blast to regions of eternal woe

his

his whole accursed race!" Loud and deep were her execrations; a tempest of furious passions ruffled her whole form, which looked like nothing human. "On Theodore too," she roared—"on Theodore de Willenberg shall my vengeance also fall. He—he it was who, slighting, scorning me, brought me to this. But fatal to him was the day he did so. My wrongs cry aloud for retribution; they ascend to the highest heaven—they pierce to the depths of hell, and retribution they shall behold!"

Frantic and desperate, she sent forth her curses upon the whole family of the miscreant Eugene; fate, awful and terrible, appeared to guide her denunciations. Misfortune hourly pursued the baron Gesnel, until, in a fit of insanity, he put an end to his existence by poison, and his broken-hearted lady did not long survive him. Thus, by death, were two of the objects of her vindictive rage removed. Eugene too was far beyond her reach; but still
one

one remained—the cloistered Stephania; and on her devoted head she vowed to pour the whole torrent that else had fallen equally on all.

As if her unlucky stars had not yet done their worst, she was now doomed to hear that De Willenberg was high in favour at Herman Castle, from which a rumour was set afloat that its beautiful heiress, Victoria, was shortly to become his bride.

This she was aware she could neither prevent nor retard; but having made up her mind on the great object of securing Stephania as one sure victim, she left it to chance to give her an opportunity of making either Theodore or Victoria another. To the ears of her parents she durst not breathe what had happened—to them durst not make known her shame, for with all their failings, Bernardine and his wife were honest and virtuous, and would have spurned and discarded, without mercy, the

child who had brought disgrace upon them in their old age. But she saw that to remain long at home, and still keep it concealed, would be impossible. She was gradually advancing in her pregnancy, and thought it better to retreat in time, to avoid the sneers and scorns of an unpitiful world.

Stephania had by this time raised herself, by her arts, to the unmerited dignity of abbess of the convent of St. Agnes, and there it was Maddeline's intention to seek an asylum for the remainder of her life, where she might hide her ignominy, and in secret nourish her meditated vengeance. She had never, to her knowledge, seen Stephania; but judging of her from the baseness and perfidy of her brother, and from his ample description of her, she concluded, that being of the same stock, the same depravity of principle must also be inherent in her, and of course, that even loaded with infamy as she herself was, she should easily

easily obtain admittance, by the assistance of a considerable sum of money, with which he meant to present her.

Having purloined a vast quantity of ready cash and jewels to an enormous value, she forthwith left her father's house clandestinely, and proceeded to the monastery, where, as she had foreseen, the *pious* and charitable superior of the community was very soon wrought by the sight of her gold into pity for her misfortunes; and notwithstanding that Maddeline was likely soon to become a mother, she scrupled not to let her bring forth the proof of her guilt beneath her sanctified roof. Stephania had never either seen or heard of her before, and consequently was in total ignorance of how great a share her brother Eugene had borne in that guilt; nor was it Maddeline's intention to inform her, or even to drop the slightest hint that could produce a suspicion of it, for such a suspicion would render her watchful, apprehensive, and dis-

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trustful,

trustful, and perhaps defeat every attempt at vengeance. Under these circumstances she had, on entering the convent, assumed the name of Constantia Zauberflod, and gave that of her seducer as one whom she was certain the abbess had never seen. Against this one she pretended to direct all her indignation, and to contemplate the possibility of her being yet fully avenged on him—a possibility which Stephania certainly could not see in her present state of seclusion, for she had now entered the noviciate, and solemnly sworn to take the veil at the expiration of it.

A still-born child, to the birth of which none but the abbess and old Garcia the portress were privy, was soon the evidence of the deluded wretch's guilty amour, and was quickly committed to the earth in a retired part of the garden.

She had so managed her dress for a few months, as never to give rise to the least
idea

idea of her situation in the minds of the sisterhood; and now that such a disguise was no longer necessary, and her noviciate ended, she was formally professed, and received the veil, as a cloak for all her future crimes.

A valuable chain of diamonds, which she presented to the superior, induced the latter to take an oath—a binding and tremendous oath, that no human power, no earthly tortures, should ever force from her a word of what she had confided to her, or a confession in any shape of this execrable transaction.

Firmly believing that no occasion could ever occur to extort such a confession, and far from suspecting that vengeance would ever be aimed against herself, the abbess unwarily took the oath required. By the cross she swore to carry the whole a secret with her to the tomb—swore never to reveal to mortal ought concerning her which

she might be called upon to make known, appealing to Heaven to attest her sincerity.

This inviolable oath having passed her lips, the unfortunate Stephania had sealed the warrant for her own doom, and the fiend who had made her do so, could scarcely conceal her triumph. They now deemed it politic, and Maddeline more favourable to her views, to feign a mutual friendship—a sentiment that neither of them had ever been capable of inspiring in any bosom; and while they secretly hated and abhorred each other, for one had not long remained a stranger to the other's disposition, expressions of the most affectionate regard passed constantly between them.

The next thing to be done was to ingratiate herself, if possible, with some of the nuns and novices, for either of those she intended should be the agents of her
revenge;

revenge; but this she did not find exactly very practicable, as, unhappily for her, she had not been able to render herself more a favourite with them than she had been amongst her juvenile companions at school.

The novices usually lived apart from the professed sisterhood, and, with *her* in particular, wished not to associate. The amiable part of the latter felt the same repugnance to her society, and the less liberal-minded ones envied and detested her, because she seemed to monopolize the favour and confidence of the lady abbess. But though thus situated, she yet despaired not of being able to carry her plan into execution.

To a few of the nuns, who, knowing she was high in power, had encouraged her overtures of apparent friendship, she had more than once cautiously ventured to represent the facility with which they might, if they wished, escape from the convent,

and from the tyranny and cruelty of Stephania for ever; but such hints were totally lost upon them, for even that tyranny and cruelty seemed infinitely more tolerable than the consciousness would be of having broken their vows. Every proposal, every suggestion of the sort, they promptly rejected, for they had penetration enough to discover the motive that actuated her.

At length, to her joy, came Victoria, the one whose young and unsuspecting mind she hoped might be easily wrought upon, by those specious arguments she had hitherto used so unsuccessfully. She had, as well as the rest of the nuns, been instantly struck by her uncommon beauty, which, by attracting such general notice and admiration, raised her curiosity more particularly to know who she was—a curiosity she left no means untried to gratify. At first, the possibility of her being the identical Victoria so universally noted for her
her

her personal endowments, and the object of Theodore de Willenberg's affection, forcibly struck her ; yet it did not appear likely that she had resided in the neighbourhood of the convent, or surely in such a place she never would have sought an abode.

All her manœuvring and her artifices were now directed to find out whether she was in reality the one she represented herself to be, and, at all events, to discover the cause of one so young and beautiful entering a monastery avowedly for life. To elicit her confidence, it seemed necessary that she should in some measure bestow hers ; and to this end had she fabricated the tale already narrated of her Spanish parentage and state persecutions, so plausibly told, that Victoria must have been more than sceptical to doubt it. Victoria's prudence, however, as we have shewn, baffled completely all the efforts of her pretended friendship ; still hope did not forsake her,

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that.

that time and perseverance would effect her purpose.

In the interim she thought it as well to keep on good terms with the abbess, whose treachery, she doubted not, was equal to her own, and from whom one unfavourable word might open Victoria's eyes, and mar her design at once. To this alone was owing her seeming penitence for the insolence with which she had at first treated our heroine. But the hour for her masterpiece was fast advancing; its approach was announced by the arrival at the convent of the one she had least hoped to see—the very one whom now she most hated—Theodore de Willenberg!

Never did savage joy and exultation rise to such a pitch in the bosom of mortal, as was that of Maddeline de Klopstock when she beheld him—when assured that De Willenberg himself really stood before her—that Stephania, Victoria, Theodore,
all

all were in her power!—"Heaven and hell have heard my prayer," she impiously said to herself; "they have given me my victims; and oh, if I pour not my fellest vengeance on them—if I blast them not, may the same fate overtake myself, and salvation never be mine!"

Now did she triumph in the recollection of the fatal vow of secrecy the abbess had pledged—now did she look forward to the certain accomplishment of her atrocious plot; but the mask was not yet to be thrown off—all was not ripe for its execution.

Drawing her veil so closely over her features as to prevent the possibility of Theodore's seeing them, she followed Garcia to the gate, on receiving the message, and courteously inquired the business upon which he had come; but when he announced himself as don Guzman, the

H 6

brother

brother of donna Clara (and well she knew that the pretended Clara had no brother), it was yet more favourable to her views to let them pass for brother and sister, and she instantly determined on promoting what she guessed to be the real object of his visit—Victoria's escape.

In this attempt she trusted that the lovers would fall by the musket of the sentinel, whose orders were to fire immediately on any one who should be daring enough to scale the wall; but should they *not*, she was well aware of the dreadful doom that always awaited a novice for breaking her vow and eloping, as well as the partner of her guilty flight; and to such doom she knew they would inevitably be sentenced. The consequences to herself might perhaps be fatal, should the part she acted ever by any chance become known; yet a little reflection told her she was guarded against such a contingency;

as

as from the abbess she had nothing to fear on account of her oath, so also she resolved to exact one equally binding now.

When she had arranged with her unsuspecting victims the plan for their escape, and thought that De Willenberg had had time to bribe the sentinel, she repaired privately to the latter, after having parted from Victoria in the dormitory, and with some pieces of gold more than he had received from Theodore, allured him to break his fidelity to him, and secretly get another guard to supply his place for the night.

Without a moment's hesitation the sordid wretch complied; and taking the proffered purse, he easily engaged one of his comrades to take his post for a few hours at the northern gate of the monastery. This man too, she meant, should play a principal part in the tragedy, and she hastened to give him her instructions, accompanying

accompanying them with some money, and assurances of a rich reward if he executed them with punctuality and cleverness. He was to pretend not to see either De Willenberg or Victoria, until certain of his aim, and then instantly to fire, and, if possible, put an end to them both.

Matters being thus far decided, this Machiavelian woman, with all the consummate hypocrisy she was mistress of, stole on tiptoe to Victoria's cell, to announce to her that it was close upon ten o'clock. Our confiding heroine had long been anxiously waiting for her, and the moment she appeared, joy beamed over her beautiful features. Joy was also visible in Maddeline's, but it was from a different source, and of a different expression: Victoria's was occasioned by the sweet hope of being soon reunited to all on earth she so truly loved; Maddeline's by the prospect of being amply revenged upon all she so truly hated. They crept softly
along

along the dormitory, fearful of awaking any of the nuns; and having passed through the cloisters, and reached the outer court in safety, they waited for the signal agreed upon. At length came the long-wished-for sound of the clock; but when the last stroke vibrated on the air, and the rope-ladder was flung over from without, Victoria trembled in violent agitation, and was scarcely able to ascend it. In this, however, she was assisted by Madeline, who returned the pressure of the affectionate girl's hand, as she mounted towards the top.—“Remember your oath,” she again urged, in a solemn and impressive tone.

“So may Heaven remember me!” said Victoria, who, in a moment afterwards, was out of sight.

CHAP.

CHAPTER V.
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Ascend, ye ghosts ! fantastic forms of night,  
In all your different dreadful shapes ascend,  
And match the present horror if ye can.      ROWE.

**APPALLED** at Constantia's terrible denunciations, for by that name we shall henceforth know her, which would have struck horror into any human breast, Conrad stood for some time transfixed to the spot where his master had thought it prudent for him to conceal himself.

Meanwhile the latter had somewhat recovered his bewildered senses; but they only returned to shew him his unparelled situation in all its terrors. The beloved being, for whom he had risked so much, lying before him on the ground, to all appearance lifeless; the sentinel, who had ventured

ventured to oppose him, fallen by his hand; himself threatened with some tremendous fate, by one whose vindictive spirit knew no bounds—such a picture had, he believed, never been presented to the eye or the mind of man before.

The voice of the sentinel brought him to himself.—“Father of Heaven, receive my soul—I am murdered!” ejaculated the wounded wretch, while the blood streamed frightfully from his side.

De Willenberg looked fiercely on him, and without a single sentiment of pity.—“Ay, die, thou dastard dog!” he cried; “thou foulest thing that ever wore man’s form!” The rapid and frenzied rolling of his eye was frightful to behold—it indicated some desperate purpose.—“Sainted spirit of my Victoria!” exclaimed he, as he rushed towards her, “look down on earth, and behold thy death avenged! stretch forth thine arms now to clasp thy Theodore; for this same weapon shall disappoint

point all threats, and send my soul to join thee!"

"In the name of Heaven, senor, what is it you would do?" demanded Conrad, who had darted forward and seized his arm; "would you dare to attempt *your own life*?" and he snatched the sword from his trembling hand.

The remonstrance appeared to check the convulsive agitation of his frame, which suddenly became composed; his arms dropped passively beside him—his features lost all their fierceness, and assumed a cast of deep melancholy; turning his eyes languidly on his servant, a tear glistened in them as he articulated—"My kind Conrad, I knew not what I was about—my senses were disordered! Alas! alas! to what a deplorable state am I reduced, when force alone could save me from a crime so horrible—self-destruction! but my Victoria—my murdered Victoria! why stand I thus here? why heed I myself, and your lovely form lying lifeless on the  
the

the cold earth? Oh, Conrad, Conrad, what a sight is this!" and with a loud burst of anguish he stooped to raise her. Lifting her in his enfeebled arms, he uttered a wild cry of joy—"She breathes—she lives! by all that is merciful, she still lives!" said he; "her pulse throbs! she revives! for this, oh, Providence, I thank thee! Look up, my beloved—it is your Theodore who calls you! know you not his voice? speak to me, my Victoria!"

"Theodore," she faintly faltered, as her eyes slowly opened, and she gazed mournfully around—"Oh! where are we? what dreadful, horrid place is this? who hath brought us hither?"

"Fear nought, my love, from its horrors; you are safe while I am near to protect you."

Her eye rested on the motionless form of the guard; and as if only now conscious of their situation—"Oh, take me hence!" cried she; "let us away, nor dare to linger  
on

on this fatal spot! we shall be pursued, and if overtaken, oh, my Theodore! we shall again be separated! the vile emissaries of the abbess will drag me to that frightful cell again! What, what have you done, De Willenberg?" she demanded, pointing towards the sentinel.

Theodore gasped with horror at the magnitude of the crime of murder.—“He aimed at your precious life, my angel, and I, oh, God!—I stabbed him to the heart!” He put his hands to his burning forehead; large drops of perspiration trickled from it—his soul was wrung with anguish, and he tottered a few paces, exclaiming—“This is the climax of my misery—I am a murderer!”

“Let us away instantly,” again urged Victoria, acquiring strength from the contemplation of their general danger; “my life is safe, Theodore; terror for the moment overpowered me, but I am quite unhurt—quite safe. Good Heaven! if we

we delay here, what may be our fate? come, come away!" and leaning on his arm for support, she arose.

"Come then, my guardian angel," said he, "since you *are* safe; then will I endeavour to preserve my own life—still have I something to live for—I will live for you alone."

"Senor, what is to be done with the body?" hastily inquired Conrad; "we must not leave it here—it will discover all if we do, and who can tell what may follow?"

Again they paused in a state of painful indecision; should they leave the body thus exposed, it might indeed, as Conrad suggested, lead to an immediate discovery; and, on the other hand, should they imprudently delay there, would it not be running a risk of being taken? and after all, what could they do with the body? how dispose of it, or how conceal it? Their situation was indeed a pitiable one.

Whilst

Whilst thus wavering, several voices were heard of men rapidly approaching, evidently with no favourable intentions towards them, of whom, Conrad, from some words he had distinctly heard, was convinced they were in search.

Victoria's terrors were now at their height, and she clung to Theodore for his promised protection.

“What fears my Victoria?” said he, clasping her still closer to his bosom—  
“think you these men, whoever they are, dare harm you, or would dare to lay a hostile hand upon you? By Heaven! ere they do, they must first deprive me of my sword, and the power to wield it in your defence!”

A body of armed soldiers now advanced into the open space before them, headed by a prefect of police, a ferocious-looking man, from whose repulsive aspect neither courtesy nor lenity was to be expected.—

ed.—“Whither go ye, strangers?” he demanded, in a rough and surly voice, which fully justified them in their opinion of him, at the same time extending a naked sabre that he held in his hand, as if to impede their further progress.

At sight of such a crowd, against whom Theodore felt at once that opposition would be fruitless, he almost lost all self-possession.—“Question us not—we know not!” he wildly replied, waving him off—“we know not! hence! away! and let us pass on!”

“Ye stir not hence,” insisted the other, “until we have learned the cause of all this alarm—a musket hath been fired just now—where is the guard?”

“Yonder he lies a bleeding corpse!” said a soldier, pointing to him.

“What! murdered? by all the saints, he is!” exclaimed the prefect; “have you done this bloody and abominable deed?” he inquired of Theodore.

“I have

“ I have—thou art answered,” replied the latter.

“ In the king’s name then we make you three our prisoners! Soldiers, to your duty! bear them away!”

“ Never!” cried De Willenberg, roused into his usual energy, and putting himself in a posture of defence, while he drew his sword from its scabbard—“ never! while this sword can awe them off, and I have strength to use it! while I have life, it shall defy you all—begone, I say, and let us pass!”

“ Insolent maniac, do you dare to lift your sword against the officers of justice? but your temerity shall be punished as it deserves. Soldiers, bind them instantly, and bear them to prison!”

“ Gracious God! to prison!” cried the half-frantic Victoria. “ Oh, no, no! you mean it not—you would not do so! surely the cruelties of your office cannot have torn humanity from your heart! For *His* sake,

sake, from whom you expect mercy yourself, I beseech you let us be free, and we will reward and bless you for it!"

"We want no blessings!" said the stern savage; "cease your canting, woman! it will avail you nothing—away, soldiers! away with them to the prison!"

"Ruffians!" cried Conrad, dashing off one of the men who had seized De Willenberg's arm; "know ye who they are whom thus ye dare to insult?"

"Be silent, Conrad," hastily interrupted Theodore.

"Your names, I demand!" said the prefect, peremptorily; "say directly who and what ye are: this woman I take to be one of the holy order of St. Agnes, from her garb; and you, impious wretch! have been aiding her to escape—your names instantly!"

"*My* name is don Guzman; the lady's donna Clara, and that is our attendant; more than this ye shall not know from me."

"Enough; lead on, soldiers! we will  
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tame their proud, audacious spirits—bind them fast.”

“By my soul, you bind us not!” maintained De Willenberg.

“We must submit—resistance is in vain,” faltered Victoria, and bursting into tears, she sank at Theodore’s feet.

“Have ye no hearts, barbarians?” cried the latter; “are your bosoms stone or adamant, that such a sight as this, that might move the fellest Roman tyrant, cannot move *you*?—but lead on—lead on; it is but talking to the winds, or worse, to cruel unfeeling monsters as ye are. Come, my love! we must indeed submit to overpowering numbers; yet ere their hands shall come nigh you with unhallowed touch, they shall——”

“A truce with your bravado at present, young man!” interrupted the prefect, in a tone of cool contempt; “it wont do for where ye are going, nor wipe the crimes of murder and sacrilege from your consciences; we will soon teach you to regard  
the

the laws, and respect the power ye thus presume to insult. On, soldiers, on! ring the alarm-bells—beat the loud drums—rouse up the inhabitants, that they may view this scene of slaughter, and cry aloud for justice upon these murderers! quick, quick, I say! away with them to prison!"

Some of the men now bore off the body of the sentinel; and others, in the meantime, bound the hands of Conrad, who had at first been rather refractory; but the poor fellow, seeing the weeping Victoria and his master made captives, offered no further resistance.

De Willenberg and Victoria were permitted to walk together; their hearts were too full to allow either of them, for some time, to speak; tears trickled rapidly down the cheeks of the former, but he wept not for himself. Much more than this could he have borne, were he alone the sufferer, and Victoria safe; but to be-

1 2

hold

hold a young and lovely female—that female the one his heart adored, exposed to the ruffianly insolence of these men—to behold her too on the way to a prison, under the dreadful imputation of sacrilege, of which he dared not conjecture the consequences, almost required more than the fortitude of man.

Their situation was really a terrible one to contemplate, and recalled to our heroine her reflections in the convent on the instability of all human affairs—the short duration of all human happiness.—“Short-lived indeed,” thought she, “has been *our* reign of happiness; its sun has set, and will probably never rise on us in this life again.”

Her lover's thoughts were of the same cast, sad, dreary, and hopeless; she seemed aware that his anguish was more on her account than his own, and endeavoured, though ineffectually, to reconcile him to their fate, whatever it might be.—“I have been  
a parti-

a participator in your happier hours, my Theodore," said she, "and think you, when misfortune falls upon you—when you are threatened with the worst of all misfortunes, disgrace, that I have not a right to share it? yes, as we have lived, as we have thus risked life together, so, if it must be, together we will die," and the words almost choking her, she sobbed aloud.

Neither, in fact, was capable of offering consolation to the other, unless it might be deemed such, that they were not known to their merciless conductors. They were now indeed about to be led before the very face of justice and of ignominy; and from the moment this appeared to be the case, they had determined that nothing should compel them to reveal their names, or give any clue by which it might be discovered who they were.

Even to die, had this noble-minded  
13 pair

pair resolved, as the ones they represented themselves to be, rather than own their alliance to count Herman, and by such a transaction bring the bitterest agony to his wounded heart, and the most indelible obloquy on his illustrious name.—“ Oh! never, never,” said Victoria, “ shall the ignominious death of his child break so good a father’s heart! let him mourn me as lost to him for ever, secluded beyond recall in a dreary monastery, but never shall he know my misfortunes or disgrace! never shall the burning blush of shame tinge his aged cheek, by the knowledge that his daughter, his only child, has perhaps perished on a scaffold! Alas! too much already has he to reproach me with!”

The horrid din of the alarm-bell, still ringing violently, had roused from their beds almost all the inhabitants of the village; to whom the atrocious crime of a novice eloping from the convent with a man, and the murder that followed, having  
been

been made known, they crowded round them with the most eager curiosity, to behold the female who possessed, what they termed, so daring and impious a spirit, and the wicked and sacrilegious wretch, as they called Theodore, who had assisted her: in this however they were disappointed; they had but a momentary glimpse of their figures, as they passed through the line of guards that were stationed at the entrance of a large gloomy-looking building, which was to be their prison for the night.

The prefect, with his accustomed air of haughty and magisterial dignity, ordered the soldiers to keep the people off, and the unhappy captives were conducted to the apartments respectively allotted to them.

When Theodore could spare Victoria a moment from his thoughts, his first consideration was for Conrad. It appeared il-

liberal and unjust to allow this affectionate domestic to suffer thus on his account; but surely he thought it would be absolutely criminal, were he to let him run the dreadful hazard of being convicted, along with him, of an offence, in which he had really had no share, and, of course, of having the same sentence passed against him.

This he now ventured to represent to the prefect, who sternly interrupted him.—“It is but a waste of my time,” said he, “to listen to these idle remonstrances; I tell you, sir, they are in vain; the consequences of your crimes will fall equally on the three of you, if I mistake not the laws of that high and august tribunal, before which to-morrow’s fatal noon will bring you; till then, methinks this is enough for you to know.”

Meanwhile Victoria had been attended to her little chamber, which was strongly guarded

guarded on the outside, by a young girl, daughter to the keeper of the prison, whose words and manner instantly declared that she had a generous and feeling heart. She longed to know the history of her fair charge, and the circumstances (for uncommon, she thought, they must be) that could lead a young lady, so highly gifted by nature, to enter a monastery for the avowed purpose of secluding herself there for life, and afterwards to elope, and with her brother. But knowing the character of the abbess of St. Agnes, she readily concluded that the unparelled austerities practised there had driven her thence, and she was the more inclined to pity her for the consequences. She would have informed her of the terrible punishments by which such offences were usually visited, but she saw that Victoria wished to be alone, and that her mind was already in too disturbed a state to be able to bear any additional torture; and after wishing her, what it was impossible she could

experience, a tranquil night, she left her for a few hours to weep in solitude over her own and her Theodore's hapless destiny.

To Theodore solitude and reflection were however infinitely more agonizing; for to the horrors that surrounded him, and the still-deeper ones that threatened him, were added all the lacerating pangs of self-accusation. He was himself the author of this dire calamity! he it was who had plunged Victoria into guilt and into misery, that would end but with the few short hours of life! But for *him*, would aught of this have ever befallen her? —no! Had she never known him, would any thing have ever placed her in such a situation as her present one? would any thing ever have ruffled the serenity of her life?—no! Had she never known him, would any thing ever have brought the high-born Victoria within the walls of a dungeon?—oh, never, never! she had now been in the bosom of her adoring family,

mily, amidst the splendour her birth entitled her to, and as happy as she deserved to be.

Sad and heart-rending was the picture now. His very soul was harrowed with this conviction, and despair took almost entire possession of him.—“Oh, Father of Mercy, forgive me for all this!” he ejaculated, sinking on his knees; “endue her with fortitude to bear her through these unequalled trials, and teach her young heart to forgive me also. But how,” exclaimed he, starting up, and pacing the room in wild and frantic disorder—“how shall I hope for her father’s forgiveness? how shall I endure his curse, his heavy and bitter malediction, when he shall know that the one whom his friendship cherished and honoured, brought destruction on the child his very heart and soul adored?”

Worn out with extreme agony, he threw himself on the hard and uncomfortable  
I 6 couch.

couch that had supported the trembling limbs of many an unfortunate culprit before.

The night he spent was one of such wretchedness as he had never known before: frightful dreams disturbed his transient slumbers, and appalling visions rose to his frenzied imagination. He thought on one side he beheld Victoria, the victim of her fatal attachment to him, expiring beneath the cruellest tortures of the inquisitorial power; while, on the other, stood the count, her father, the fiercest fires of vengeance flaming from his eyes, brandishing in his hand a naked sabre, ready, at a blow, to sever the head from that fascinating form which had lured his Victoria to destruction and death.

From these dreams he was awakened to reality next morning, at an early hour, by one of the petty officers of the prison, who, with consternation in his looks, entered

tered to inform him that he must arise without delay; the abbess of St. Agnes having dispatched a messenger in the night to the consistorial court at Warsaw, with the intelligence of the elopement of a novice from the convent; and from that dread tribunal an order had just arrived, that they should be forthwith conveyed thither under a strong military escort.

The fulfilment, to their utmost extent, of all Constantia's diabolical threats of revenge, now struck with full and terrible conviction to the chilled heart of De Wilenberg. Now indeed would vengeance, ample and horrible, be hers, if their fate had been put into the hands of the Consistory—a court whose very name brought terror with it, and where every offence against the Catholic religion was punished by tortures that were only equalled by those of the Inquisition.

If any thing was capable of rendering  
his

his situation more hopeless and desperate, it was surely such a summons as this; for from those inflexible judges no leniency, no mercy, was to be expected; and, alas! there was but little extenuation to be offered for what they had done. The abbess too would equally vent her vindictive rage against Victoria; she would doubtless exert all the influence attached to the office she filled, to have a terrible example made of them both, so that such a crime should never be attempted by any other. Altogether he saw that Constantia's vengeance would be indeed complete, for there was now no way of escaping it.

The solemn and inviolable oath by which he and Victoria had pledged themselves to secrecy, in all that concerned her in the flight of the latter, now recurred to him, as an additional cause for regret and self-reproach, for all this had she had in contemplation when she proposed that oath; and thus had she woven a net around them,  
from

from which he saw no means of their being able to disenthral themselves; for rather than violate that oath, tremendous as it was, and lay the sin of perjury upon their souls, what were the penalties, the torments, in mortal power to inflict, that it did not appear preferable to undergo? —none! But it was not in human nature to reflect coolly and undismayed on the alternate rage, the horrid exultation, and the frightful threats, of this abandoned and execrable woman. He recalled her to his mind, just as she had stood at the convent-gate, divested of every thing human but the form; only the figure of Lucifer himself could have been more shocking to behold; and he now rejoiced at the state of insensibility which had prevented Victoria from seeing her so hideously metamorphosed, or hearing language that became none but an inhabitant of the infernal world.

Trembling at the thought of meeting  
Victoria—

Victoria—meeting her to hear her informed that she was to be arraigned before the Consistory for sacrilege, into which he had led her, he prepared to obey the awful mandate as expeditiously as circumstances would permit. He met her, after much such a night as he had passed himself, advancing down the staircase that led from the part of the building appropriated to the female captives; but how altered was her appearance! how sad and sudden the change!—that form, that face, where, so lately, unrivalled beauty had shone in all the attractive loveliness of perfect health, now no longer wore its vigorous aspect, or its roseate bloom. She was pale, languid, and unwell; her eyes had lost their sparkling lustre, and their heavy and spiritless cast, as they met his fearful gaze, almost appeared to him as the last faint gleam of departing life. He fancied it, what it was really not intended for, a glance of deep reproach; and, self-convicted, he would have flown from her presence, had not the sight

sight of the guards reminded him that he could not do so.

“We have received an awful summons,” observed Victoria, at length gaining utterance through her tears.

“Ye have indeed, lady,” replied the prefect, “and one that is likely to lead you to your *last* summons; I warrant you will never inform us of what they do to you, for they say, ‘dead people tell no tales;’” and he accompanied his words with a malignant laugh.

“Unfeeling, barbarous monster!” exclaimed De Willenberg, darting a look of contempt and horror at him; he seized Victoria’s passive hand for a moment, but it was only for a moment. They had reached the large entrance-door, and, at the prefect’s command, they were hurried quickly into the carriages that waited to convey them separately to the tribunal of the Consistory at Warsaw.

CHAP.

## CHAPTER VI.

The shuddering angels round th' eternal throne,  
 Veiling themselves in glory, shriek, "impossible!"  
 But hell doth know it true. *Tragedy of Bertram.*

FEASTING all her vindictive passions with the diabolical scheme of iniquity she further meditated, Constantia, having made sure of her two first victims, repaired swiftly and cautiously to the cell of Garcia, the portress, who was asleep; but tapping gently, she awoke her.

"Blessed Virgin!" ejaculated the terrified old woman, rubbing her eyes, which were almost sightless, "what has brought you here, daughter, at such an hour of the night as this, when I thought every soul in the convent was in their second sleep?"

"Something for your advantage, my friend,"

friend," said the nun, rushing in and hastily shutting the door; "but speak low, I entreat you, dear, dear Garcia, or we may be overheard. You are a good old soul, and would, I know, do any thing to serve me, and therefore I will reward you nobly."

"Ay, that I would, Heaven bless you, daughter! I would lose my very life to serve you! God keep me from all harm! but what is it I must do?"

"First pocket these three golden ducats, as an earnest of the vast reward I intend you, and then you must swear——"

"I will swear any thing!" interrupted the hag, grasping the ducats, as if they were the records of her salvation—"name the oath."

"Swear by this cross, you will faithfully do all that I shall require of you, and never, never betray me."

"I swear it!" said Garcia, pressing the cross to her withered lips. "Now tell me, daughter, whom does this same oath concern?"

"It

“ It concerns our lady the abbess.”

“ Ah! Heaven bless the dear, sweet soul, and all that *does* concern her! I am sure I love her as if she was my own born sister.”

“ Do you indeed? methinks it is but lately you have become so wonderfully affectionate!” observed Constantia, sarcastically; “ but perhaps *she* can reward your *affection* better than my poor ducats can.”

“ *She* reward me! a murrain on her stingy heart! she never gave me a single florin in her life. *She* reward me! the miserly old cat!—marry, a likely thing indeed!”

“ What! not even for your long and faithful services here?”

“ Not a tinsel!”

“ Nor for your gaining her the favour of the last abbess, and so helping her into her present dignity?”

“ Ah! God forgive me for saying a word in her favour to any body, or helping  
ing

ing her into it at all. I only wish I could help her out of it again to the bottom of the Red Sea!"

"Do you really wish she was removed from it?"

"Ay, marry! to Jericho, or Jerusalem, or old Nick, or anywhere out of this!"

"A proof how sincerely you love her!"

"Indeed I do not, nor ever did. I wonder what I should love her for! Ah, child! I wish you were in her place, and I should love you dearly."

"No doubt it would be *dearly*, sure enough," thought Constantia. Then taking the hand of this matured hypocrite in hers—"This, my friend, is exactly the point I wished to come to," said she. "You actually wish then that I was the abbess of St. Agnes?"

"Ah, that I could see that day! A happy day it would be for us all, if old Stephania was put out of the way!"

"So she shall!" said the determined nun.

nun. " Ill gotten—ill gone. She gained her place by her own deep artifices, and she shall lose it by *mine*. *I will* be lady abbess; and for your assistance in the affair, will, when I am such, raise you to a station far higher than your present one."

" Bless your sweet face! You will be an ornament and an honour to it—not like the vile Stephania, God forgive her wicked soul!"

" Yes, she is wicked enough to do any thing. Hark you, Garcia, do not you remember something about her giving you a new-born infant one night to bury in the garden?"

" Ay, lady, *your* sweet babe, Heaven bless it!" Seeing a terrible frown darken Constantia's features, she stammered—" No, not *yours*; but the—the child—but the infant, I mean, that the abbess handed me—ay, the lady abbess herself; and sure and certain I am that it was her own, the vile scandalous creature!"

" You

“ You really then believe, without any doubt, that it was hers?” asked the nun, in a tone from which Garcia instantly took her answer.

“ Doubt ! why, child, how could I doubt what I saw with my own two good eyes— a thing as clear as daylight? Between ourselves, I knew that our lady the superior was pregnant long before. But, God reward me ! I am not one of your mischief-makers, and so I held my tongue.”

Even Constantia shuddered at the enormous depravity of this woman ; but it was not her part to condemn her, and veiling, as well as she could, whatever disgust she was capable of feeling at falsehood so monstrous, beneath her gratification at having thus brought her exactly to her purpose—“ That child, Garcia,” said she, “ *was* the superior’s ; and woeful to her was the day it saw the light. By my forbearance and silence she has hitherto escaped the punishment due to her foul  
and

and lustful crime—justice has slumbered till now, but it slumbers no longer; it shall rise, bloody and tremendous as the lion wakes upon his prey! Ay, Garcia, I *hate* the abbess! for great and terrible reasons I hate her, and the one whom *my* hatred falls on is lost! Now you comprehend me, and know what I expect of you. Remember your oath of allegiance to me, and as you prove false or faithful to me, so will *I* deal with *you*. Once more, remember, Garcia, that *my* resolves are irrevocable—my hatred *fatal!*"

Saying this, she shook Garcia's shrivelled hand, as an earnest of her friendship; and having informed her when she would probably be called upon to fulfil her oath, she left this minion of vice to a restless night, and hastened on to the maturation of her plot.

She retired to her cell for a while, and throwing off some of her outer clothes, she

she put on a sort of *robe de nuit*, as if she had just risen from bed, and then proceeded to the sleeping apartment of the abbess.

She had previously prepared her accommodating countenance, by assuming as much of the *épouvante* and dismal as hypocrisy could furnish her with, and tapping gently, she was admitted.

The abbess was really alarmed at so uncommon a visit, and trembling, she stretched forth her head, to ascertain if the unhallowed figure of some man in the corridor might not be the cause of all this. —“ Daughter,” said she, “ in the name of the Holy Virgin, I ask, what can have led you thus to intrude upon my hours of repose?”

“ Oh, lady, something dreadful and uncommon, you may be sure! I have been terrified almost out of my senses. Have you not heard the report of a musket?”

“A musket, child!” repeated the abbess, her saintly eyes dilating with fresh alarm, and her whole frame trembling. “Where—where?”

“It could only have been at the northern gate, lady. Perhaps some one, in the abominable shape of man, has been attempting to——”

“What! to enter our immaculate sanctuary, as the evil one stole into the garden of Eden? Heaven and earth! a maddening thought rushes on my brain! Daughter! daughter! it will drive me frantic!—it will kill me quite! That daring wretch, whose presence polluted our walls this evening—it is *he*—it is he! Let me not name him—it is Clara’s infamous paramour. With the speed of the wind fly to see if all is safe in the dormitory. Look to that vile wanton, Clara de Manzilla!”

“Holy mother! this is what I myself suspected. I saw lust, and all the sin of the devil, in his countenance. The monster

ster too (oh, horror of horrors!) is her brother!"

"I will go myself," exclaimed Stephania, snatching the lamp from the nun, and hardly knowing what she was about—"I will go myself, and if such a thought has but crossed her mind, as an elopement hence, I will tear her limb from limb, and hurl her piecemeal to perdition!"

Almost in the next moment these two proselytes of Satan were in the dormitory. Every cell was explored, and every novice visible but Victoria. She had indeed fled, and, not a doubt remained, with her supposed brother.

Loud, wild, and stormy, was the rage of the abbess; she looked like the presiding demon of the nether regions, gathering her imps about her to execute some hellish and terrible command.

The whole convent was alarmed, and  
K 2 in

in a few minutes all its inmates had started from their beds, to mingle in the general outcry and consternation. Constantia was amongst the loudest and most violent in their exclamations against the fugitive, bewailing the indelible stigma such a circumstance would bring upon the whole order, sympathizing in all the superior's wrath and indignation, and, in fine, acting her part to such perfection, that it was totally impossible she could be suspected to have had any knowledge of the transaction.

From the dormitory they hastened to the northern gate, but there neither sentinel nor any body else was to be seen; but the rope-ladder, which still hung upon the wall, put an end at once to all uncertainty, and bore the strongest testimony to Victoria's elopement.

At sight of it most of the godly sisterhood uttered audible ejaculations of displeasure,

pleasure, at the same time folding their arms meekly across their bosoms, and turning up the whites of their eyes with the truest devotion and Christian charity, to pray for Heaven's direst judgment on the offenders.

Constantia suggested that they had probably been secured, and conveyed for the night to the prison in the village, and advised that she should immediately write to the Consistory at Warsaw, to inform them of the sacrilegious crime, and give the profligate pair completely into the hands of justice.

This Stephania had already resolved to do. With the bitterest hatred against Victoria, she remembered her indignant and offensive expressions of disgust at her treatment of Bertha in the morning. Stung by the insult, she had, in the rancour of her wounded pride, vowed that it should not long go unpunished; and now

K 3

how

how ample, and to Victoria how terrible, was her opportunity!

She waited at the gate until a fresh guard came, from whom she ascertained what had happened, and who, being accompanied by another soldier, she desired the latter to return in half an hour, to receive a letter, which she meant he should be the bearer of with all possible speed to Warsaw, and which she presently afterwards withdrew to write, as well as the turbulent state of her mind would allow.

In the meantime Constantia, carefully locking herself in her cell, set about a similar occupation; but greater, far greater was its object, infinitely wider was the plan it embraced, and infinitely more horrible was the magnitude of that plan and its effects.

On the unconscious Stephania was fixed, as she had told Garcia, her deadliest hatred,

tred, and she, De Willenberg, and Victoria, were the subjects of this fatal letter. How wide a field of vengeance was now open to the vindictive spirit that burned within her! The three beings whom her soul detested, all in her power! ay, bound fast, and for ever, in the plenitude of her power, by their solemn and irrevocable oaths. Never before had vengeance glutted upon a thought so truly exquisite; nor ever had the wicked Constantia's hand traced characters which, when written, were so delightful to her eye. Well might they be called characters of blood, for to shed human blood was the terrible and avowed purport of them.

Amongst other accusations against Stephania, which, however depraved she naturally was, were a tissue of falsehoods, was that of her having been not only aware of Victoria's meditated departure, but actually assisted her in it, and secretly sought an interview with  
K 4 her

her lover, on his arrival at the convent, in order to arrange with him the whole plan, for which she had been liberally paid.

But matter yet more "deep and dangerous" than this had the nun for her pen—a catalogue of crimes of the most atrocious nature, alleged to have disgraced the lost Stephania, completed this odious composition; to which affixing her name, she desired that she should forthwith be cited, to give her verbal evidence against the parties therein accused.

Having read it over with a gratification her bosom had never experienced before, she folded, sealed, and directed it to the holy fathers of the consistorial tribunal.

She had scarcely finished it, when a message from the superior summoned her to that lady's apartment. Stephania had concluded *her* letter, and handing it to Constantia, entreated her to take it down  
to

to the northern gate herself, and give it safely into the messenger's hand—a request with which she, with a dreadful smile of hypocrisy and deep meaning, promised compliance.

But far was it from Constantia's intention to allow this letter ever to reach other hands than her own. The moment she got beyond the cloisters, and found herself alone, she tore it into atoms, and dispersed it with the wind; then hastening onwards, she found the messenger waiting, and delivered to him the letter she had herself written, with the superior's imperative command, that he should proceed with it to Warsaw, without a moment's delay—a command which fatally he forthwith obeyed; and having seen him depart, she withdrew to her cell, to feast her thoughts there for the remainder of the night on the progress of her plot.

Sleep refused to visit the abandoned

K 5

wretch

wretch amidst such a load of sin, and the rising sun found her yet awake, and pondering over it on her pillow.

The early matin-bell called her to the performance of a ceremony she was wholly unfit for, that of addressing the Deity in prayer, the All-powerful Being she had so grossly offended.

Unwillingly, as was always the case, she repaired to the chapel, where, in conformity with her usual custom, and the obligation imposed on her, she fell on her knees, and muttered out her unintelligible forms of devotion; while her heart was far—far from that God whom her lips unfeelingly called upon.

They had not long returned to their cells, when a violent ringing at the gate announced a person on some important business, and impatient of delay.

In

In breathless anxiety the abbess waited to know who it was, and that anxiety was increased to the highest degree of alarm, when Garcia came hobbling in, her eyes gleaming with the terror she felt, to inform her that three officials from the Holy Consistory had arrived, with an order to conduct the lady abbess and sister Constantia forthwith into the presence of that sacred and august assembly.

Even the hardened Stephania was filled with consternation at this ill-boding mandate. The very idea of offending against the Consistory had ever been terrible to her, and any thing she would have deemed preferable to entering a place dreaded alike by all. But she was now specially summoned, and go she must, whatever the event might be. She tried to persuade herself that it was absolutely necessary for her to appear there, in order to substantiate the charge against the delinquents.

quents personally, and to answer circumstantially many necessary questions; but the purpose for which Constantia had been sent for she could not possibly guess. She knew the latter to be cruel, deceitful, and wicked as herself, but it never entered her mind that a plot so foul had been devised against her; and she sent for the nun, to communicate the affair, and ask her opinion of it.

Constantia was fully prepared to meet her scrutinizing gaze, and she heard the order read with apparent astonishment and perturbation. No time however was allowed them for deliberation; the officials desired that they would immediately get themselves ready; and in about half an hour they entered the carriage that was to convey them to Warsaw.

During the journey the abbess could talk or think of nothing else; for, spite of  
her

her reasoning, still she really feared that such a summons at least portended no good.

The vehicle was driven with almost the velocity of the wind, and shortly after noon they reached the capital, a little within the suburbs of which stood the place of their destination. It was a black and stupendous mass of building, surrounded on all sides by gigantic walls, whose summits it pained the eye to reach.

The carriage entered a spacious court, each side of which was lined with the guards, and different officers of the place, amongst all of whom reigned the most profound and fearful silence; and at a large arched door, studded with iron knobs, they alighted.

From within this door branched off several passages, so dark, that their extremities were not distinguishable. A  
man

man of uncouth visage descended an opposite staircase, carrying two lamps, which emitted a sickly glare, and one of which he handed to an official. The latter, turning down one of the passages, motioned to the abbess to follow him—a motion which she felt very little inclination to obey.

As she advanced, she inquired of him whether the novice who had eloped from the convent of St. Agnes, was yet arrived with her impious confederate?

“No questions, woman, but follow me in silence!” was the official’s surly reply; and it awed her haughty spirit into instant compliance, for to refuse or resist she at once perceived would be totally unavailing amongst these ruthless bands, and might subject her to measures compulsory and severe.

“Constantia Zauberflod, advance thou this way!” cried the official who had brought

brought the lamps, and in so chilling and forbidding a tone, that she ventured not a word in answer, but followed him up the same staircase he had just come down by.

They passed through two long galleries, one above the other, decorated with gloomy magnificence. Every thing around wore the stillness and silence of death; and the unequal light from a large stained-glass window at one end, mingling with the deep shadows from the other, threw such a sepulchral gloom over the whole place, that Constantia almost fancied herself in a splendid and extensive mausoleum.

At the dark extremity of the second gallery was a flight of steps, leading up to a door of ebony of the deepest black, over which was inscribed, in large gold letters —“ To the Hall of Judgment !”

Constantia's

Constantia's heart beat violently; she regretted what she had done, and would, at the moment, have cancelled all; but little time was allowed her for reflection, which was now too late. Her conductor uttering some mysterious words, the door was thrown open by one of the familiars within, clad in a long black robe, on each skirt of which was painted a large red cross.

They were admitted into a dark passage, where only a single lamp was burning, and at the farther end of which a double door opened into a formidable-looking room, of immense height and extent, where sat, in solemn array, the whole consistorial body. The apartment was an oblong, and lined throughout with black cloth. Not a window or aperture was there to admit the light of day; but a large chandelier, which was suspended from the middle of the ceiling, threw a  
stream

stream of light a few yards round it, while all the other parts of the room were almost lost in darkness.

Within the space to which its rays extended hung several paintings, of the most hideous objects imagination could give birth to. Some represented rows of heretics before the awful tribunal, stretched on the rack, and other engines of torture, and suffering agonies that only hell itself could equal, while their distorted limbs seemed crashed and mangled in a manner too horrible for the spectator to look upon long. In others appeared bloody and mutilated corpses, bearing hardly a vestige of any thing human—some fed on by birds of prey, and some in the last stage of putridity. One picture, larger than the others, was a terrific representation of that barbarous ceremony—the act of faith, the most conspicuous figures in which were those of the unhappy condemned, clad  
clad

clad in their peculiar robes, and walking in procession and barefooted to the stake, around which stood groups of unconcerned beholders, viewing the expiring agonies of the wretches amidst the flames, which men for the purpose were busily supplying with faggots. In the back-scene some fanatics were seen bearing on their shoulders the cross, at sight of which the bigoted multitude prostrated themselves to the earth.

These however were not the first objects that struck Constantia's eyes—they wandered for a moment, but were quickly recalled to the great council-table, which stood in the centre of the room, just under the chandelier, and was covered with black cloth. At the head of it, in a heavy chair of state, exalted above the others by a few steps, sat a cardinal, in his full official robes, and on either side of him three priests. A range of other spiritual officers,  
of

of various denominations, were seated along the sides; and at the bottom was a secretary, with a huge folio volume before him, and pens and ink for taking notes. Before each of the others lay ponderous books of laws and statutes, pains and penalties; and opposite the cardinal was one larger than all the rest, and covering a considerable portion of the table, in which were registered the names and offences of such unfortunate beings as had already fallen victims to the barbarous laws of this tribunal.

“Constantia Zauberslod, approach,” said the cardinal, in a hollow tone. Her mind had now somewhat accommodated itself to this terrific scene, and she obeyed, with a firm and dignified step, after dropping on her knees, and making her obeisance to the reverend assembly. “Art thou called Constantia Zauberslod?” asked his eminence.

“I am, most august and holy father.”

“Is

“ Is this thy writing?” he continued, producing her letter.

“ It is.”

“ Thou art a nun of the order of St. Agnes?”

“ Yes, father, I belong to that most pious community.”

“ Knowest thou Stephania Gesnel, abbess of the said monastery?”

“ Full well I know her.”

His words now assumed a deeper and more awful tone.—“ Constantia Zauberflod,” said he, “ thou hast in this thine handwriting alleged against Stephania, thine abbess, crimes of a most horrible, black, and damning nature. Are thine accusations founded upon truth?”

“ On truth unimpeachable as the gospel!” undauntedly replied this paragon of iniquity.

“ As unimpeachable as the gospel!” repeated one of the priests, eyeing her firmly.

“ I have said it,” she answered, with an indignant scowl.

“ Dost

“Dost thou know the novice Clara, and her brother Guzman?” demanded the cardinal.

Her letter had given them no further names.

“I know them both,” said she.

“And the misguided and abandoned sinner Clara, despising all the tenets of our holy Catholic religion, cancelling her sacred vow, and setting all consequences at open, impious defiance, did sacrilegiously and incestuously elope from the aforesaid convent, under cover of the night, with the profligate and unsanctified youth, her brother?”

“Even with her brother,” replied Constantia.

“Oh, most foul, most detestable enormity!” ejaculated the saintly fathers, each clasping the crucifix that hung from his girdle, and raising his eyes to heaven.

“And

“ And to this daring outrage the lady abbess was privy?”

“ She was—she sanctioned it all!”

“ Yet, unsatisfied with the crime of sacrilege, they dared to heap that of deliberate murder on their wretched souls—they assassinated the guard?”

“ Even so.”

“ Will you swear, Constantia, to the truth of all you have now deposed?”

“ Yes, on yonder missal I will swear to it this instant!” and she attempted to seize the book from beside the priest who had before spoken.

“ Woman, be less precipitate!” said he, waving her contemptuously from him, and putting the book aside. “ Wait respectfully until we *command* you to swear.”

“ You aver then,” resumed the cardinal, “ that the said Guzman and Clara have added to the list of their sins the wilful murder of the guard, thereby rendering the  
the

the abbess's offence tenfold more heinous and unpardonable? You can swear to this?"

"I can, righteous father. It is all too true; and there is another who can testify the veracity of what I have spoken."

"Who is that other?"

"The portress Garcia. If it please your eminence to have her summoned hither, her evidence will be material."

The cardinal now addressed the secretary, who had been all the time taking down her statement—"Note down accurately all that deponent hath said, of which she is willing to make oath; and let this Garcia forthwith be sent for. Meantime, Constantia Zauberflod, do thou withdraw until thy further testimony shall be required."

She burned with impatience to be certain of the fate of De Willenberg and Victoria, who, she hoped, had ere this been arraigned,

raigned, and received their condemnation; but the sternness of every countenance before her forbad her to hazard an interrogatory; and again bending her knee in profound veneration, she begged a blessing of his eminence, and retired.

The official who had accompanied her thither waited without in solemn silence, to conduct her whithersoever she might be ordered; and of this man, though equally repulsive in his appearance with the rest, yet, being so far inferior in power, she stood not quite so much in awe. She knew he could do no more than refuse to answer her question, and with as much suavity as might elicit the wished-for information—"Know you aught, my friend," said she, "of two prisoners of rank, brought hither this morning, charged with the crimes of sacrilege and murder?"

"They were immediately tried and sentenced to death!" he gloomily replied.

"All

“ All will soon be over with them ! But you must remain silent. I cannot answer questions.”

This injunction was however now unnecessary ; her question had been answered too satisfactorily to require any thing further ; and her heart bounding with exultation, which she had no little difficulty in concealing, she followed him, without another word, to the gloomy subterranean apartment, where she was to await the anxiously-wished-for arrival of Garcia, whom two officials were speedily sent to fetch thither.

Garcia's conscience, not being quite so clear as to render her fearless of the consistorial power, the sight of those two men was not more welcome to her than would have been the emissaries of Lucifer, whom indeed she almost considered them. Supposing at first that they came for some of the nuns, for whose safety she

began to pray aloud to every saint in the calendar, she opened the gates with reverential awe; but when a hoarse voice addressed her — “Garcia Fuescal, we are hereby commanded (producing a paper) to carry you before the most holy and reverend court of the Consistory,” a loud and discordant exclamation of terror burst from her. “Holy Virgin guard us! bring *me* before the Consistory! What can they want with *me*, that am as pure and spotless as the driven snow? praise be to me for it!”

“Keep your questions to yourself, most pure and spotless lady, and prepare your immaculate old person to accompany us—we are not come to listen to any of your foolery. Quick, quick, I say, or, by St. Agnes, we will drag you off, body and soul, just as you are, across this mule!”

This menace stimulated her immediately into action, and did not at all serve to diminish her fears, which took such  
entire

entire possession of her during the journey, that she totally forgot her late interview with Constantia; and it never once occurred to her that the awful hour was at hand, when she would be called upon either to annul or corroborate her fatal oath—either to retract or to plunge into a still more frightful depth of crime—either to save her wicked soul from the blackest perjury, or sink herself to punishments eternal.

But far, very far, from a future state were the thoughts of the wretched Garcia. Though long the bigoted inhabitant of a convent, there was as little true religion in her heart, as when, in her juvenile years, she had scoffed and derided the very ceremonies and absurdities she now most zealously practised herself. She thought only of the present circumstances. On arriving at the tribunal, she recollected but her oath to Constantia, and the menaces of that dreadful woman; and

L 2

while

while she feared not to break her allegiance to Heaven, she trembled at the idea of breaking the faith she had sworn to the nun.

She could not shake off the fears attendant on a guilty mind, as she entered the judgment-hall. It was a place that innocence itself might have shuddered at. No wonder then that the wicked Garcia felt as she did. Still the bold outward hardihood of guilt forsook her not—with an unshrinking hand she received the missal, to swear on it to the truth of what she should depose. She was then minutely questioned on every particular Constantia had mentioned, and on all of which her answers were clear, prompt, and decisive. Every thing Stephania was accused of Garcia solemnly swore to, gaining additional firmness and effrontery as she sunk lower and lower in crime; until at length, having perjured herself until perjury could do no more, she heard the  
mandate

mandate issued for the ill-fated abbess to be summoned to her trial.

She had hoped, that having given her evidence, there would be no occasion for her further detention in a place so pregnant with horror, and was fully prepared to take her departure as speedily as possible; but she had deceived herself, and was very far from feeling either comfortable or free from apprehension, when informed that she must remain there, and in solitary confinement, until the whole of the trial was over.

A momentary fear of detection seized her; but knowing Constantia too well to believe she would retract, it soon vanished, and she went to her cell with reluctance, unmingled with a shadow of compunction for her own enormities, or the doom to which she had consigned Stephania.

It was one of the known laws of the Consistory, though so incompatible with justice, that the accused, of whatever rank, should never be confronted with their accusers, nor told, directly or indirectly, who they were. If full confessions were not voluntarily made by the unfortunate culprits, they were extorted from them by all the tortures of the rack, which often forced them to avow themselves guilty of crimes they had never thought of, much less committed, so utterly intolerable were the agonies it inflicted.

Almost bursting with resentment at the indignity of having been incarcerated in a dungeon for so many hours, the abbess heard her conductor deliver the order from the council for her appearance, without condescending to reply. She fearlessly traversed the staircase and galleries; nothing like suspicion for an instant disturbed her mind, and on entering the room where sat her stern judges, her dark and  
piercing

piercing eye surveyed every object with almost perfect indifference. A formal bow was her only recognition of their dignity. Offended pride gave to her features more than their usual severity, and her proud unbending carriage looked more haughty than it had ever been before.

“Take your station yonder,” said the cardinal, pointing to a high chair, “and answer all our interrogatories in an audible voice.—What is your name?”

“Stephania, baroness Gesnel,” she replied, in an imperious tone.

“Stephania, baroness Gesnel, know you for what purpose we have commanded you into our presence?”

“*Commanded me!*” repeated she, with a look of ineffable scorn. “It is at my own desire. I am come here to deliver to your authority two sacrilegious criminals, and to demand that justice shall be done.”

L 4

“You

“ You are yourself a criminal, unhappy woman !” said the cardinal, impressively.

“ Whom do you take me for ? *I* am the lady abbess of St. Agnes,” returned Stephania, with increasing *hauteur*.

“ You *are not*: that is a rank you are no longer worthy to fill.”

“ What means your eminence ? Who has presumed to——”

“ Hold, baroness ! *you* are presuming, in talking thus noisily and unbidden. I command your silence, until it is *necessary* for you to speak. Answer our questions, and say no more.”

Obedience in this respect cost Stephania a violent exertion of her capability to dissemble. Harrowing suspicions of Constantia's treachery rushed upon her brain, with which it felt as if burning; but she forced herself to be silent, even while her blood was boiling with rage.

“ How

"How long have you been in the convent of St. Agnes?" asked one of the priests.

"I do not know; I have not calculated," replied Stephania, eyeing him contemptuously.

"But I insist on knowing!" pursued the priest.

"Five years then, if you *must* know," said the stubborn abbess, still fearless of their power.

"Insolent woman! we must and will be answered!" cried the cardinal, with a severe frown. "We have the power to curb your audacity, and teach you to respect us; therefore, I say, no more of this, or you shall feel it."

"Stephania Gesnel," resumed the priest, "do you remember——"

"I have said I am the *baroness* Gesnel," she interrupted, determined to take the utmost latitude of annoying them that she possibly could, without committing herself.

L 5

"Well,

“ Well, Stephania, baroness Gesnel, do you remember, during those five years, any thing very remarkable having happened there?”

“ I do not.”

“ I allude particularly to the birth of a child in the convent. Do you remember *that*? You are now on your oath—so to the truth!”

The abbess turned a deadly pale, and trembled from head to foot, for too well she did remember this. It was plain to her that, through some mysterious channel, they had got intelligence of her countenancing the infant's birth; and what had she not to fear from their knowledge of a transaction so disgraceful to her sacred office? Surely her degradation and ruin would follow.—“ This then,” thought she, “ was the cause of their summoning Constantia, its unfortunate guilty mother, who, ere now, may have in their torments expiated her crime.”

Seeing

Seeing her hesitate, and change colour, the priest repeated his interrogatory—  
“Do you remember *that* circumstance?”

“I do, most holy father,” she faltered out, her tone somewhat relaxing from its loftiness.

“Note that down, secretary. Who was the father of that child, baroness?”

“I cannot tell.”

“Oh, most abominable!” cried the priest. “So dissolute hath she been, that the father of her offspring cannot be specified. Secretary, write that in large letters.”

Still thinking they meant Constantia, she made no observation.

“At what time of the day or night,” inquired the cardinal, “did the birth of that child take place?”

“About midnight, if I recollect aright.”

“And at that awful hour of midnight, you, baroness Gesnel, did deliver the said  
L 6 child.

child to a certain woman, named Garcia Fuescal, desiring her to dig a grave, and commit it to the earth, in the garden of the monastery."

This had Stephania done; and unable to offer a denial, which she knew would be unavailing, she hung her head silent and abashed.

"Unnatural monster! was not your child still living when you gave this odious commission?"

"*My* child!" screamed Stephania, almost falling from her seat, and at once comprehending all their ambiguous words—"my child! merciful Heaven! who dares to say so?"

"I dare to say it, wretched wanton!" replied the cardinal. "*Your* child—the fruit of your infamy and lust."

Her passion was now too violent for further control; rage and indignation inflamed her blood, and the crimson tide  
flushed

flushed her terrible countenance—"It is false! by my soul, it is false!" cried she, as, spurning all form, she rushed from her seat, and seized the arm of the secretary, who was writing down that part of the accusation. "Desist!" said she, half-frantic, "or at your peril write this damning lie!"

"Vile woman, stand off!" said the cardinal; "do you also disown your child?"

"I tell you again, it is false!" roared the abbess, stamping violently on the floor, and hurried far beyond moderation. "Ye are *all* false, and dearly shall ye repent this villainous conspiracy."

"*You* shall instantly repent your barefaced audacity;" and saying this, the cardinal rang a small bell that stood beside him, at the sound of which four men issued from a side-door.

Their persons were completely concealed by long black robes, and their faces by masks of the same colour; and as they stood for a moment to receive their orders,  
Stephania

Stephania almost fancied them agents of the infernal power, obedient to the will of a set of beings she deemed in league with it.

“Officials, to your duty!” said the cardinal; “drag your victim to the rack!”

One of the men now drawing up a black baize curtain at the end of the room, disclosed a sight truly terrifying—racks, and various other instruments of inquisitorial punishment. The three others laid hold of her to bear her to the torture. A loud and piteous shriek burst from the unhappy woman.—“Fiends! unhand me! What is it ye would do?”

“Punish your temerity, and compel you to confess,” answered a priest.

“Confess what?”

“The murder of your infant.”

“It was not mine, I repeat—by all that is sacred, it was not!”

“This deserves no credit; yet if *not*, say *whose* was it? this instant name the mother.”

The

The name of Constantia had nearly escaped her quivering lips, but she recollected her oath in time to save her from the sin of perjury, which, bad as she was, her soul shrunk from.—“Again I repeat, it was not *my* child.”

“It is not enough, baroness; we *must* know the mother. Who is she?”

“I cannot—I must not name her.”

“You *cannot!*” reiterated the priest, with a smile of malignity.

“I *will not!* now you are answered,” said she, vehemently, and thrown off her guard by their urging her to what she was firmly resolved against.

“She is herself the mother. But we will hear no more of this daring prevarication. To the question with her instantly! we will bend her perverse and stubborn spirit to a full confession.”

In vain she screamed, implored, resisted. She was borne, almost senseless, to the rack,

rack, and fastened to it by iron chains round her arms, legs, and waist.

The engine on which she was stretched was composed of two parts, separable by means of strong ropes and pulleys attached to each, and in the gradual or forcibly-sudden separation of those, consisted the degrees of torture it was capable of inflicting.

The four officials now, by order of the cardinal, took the ropes in their muscular hands; and retreating as far as the length of them would permit, they awaited the signal, which having received, they pulled them with Herculean strength, and with the suddenness and velocity of lightning.

A shriek from Stephania, such as mortal had never uttered before, proclaimed its worse than deathlike agonies, as it echoed throughout the building. The horrid  
shock.

shock recalled her senses for a moment, and a blessing she thought it would have been, had they fled for ever. All her limbs seemed dislocated, crashed, and all her sinews rent asunder. To speak was an exertion to which her little remaining strength was quite inadequate, and murmuring forth a low sound, like an expiring groan, nature was wholly overpowered, and she fainted.

Not a syllable, not a breath, indicated the softening of their flinty hearts. Never had that ornament of human nature, compassion, found a place in the bosoms of those merciless wretches; they triumphed in her sufferings; and whilst she was thus insensible, they only relaxed the extreme tension to which they had stretched her limbs, from the apprehension that death would, in pity, snatch their victim from them.

After a long suspension of her faculties,  
she

she opened her eyes; they were dim and lustreless, and she writhed with pain.

The savage officials were about to pull the ropes again, when the cardinal demanded—"Hardened sinner, wilt thou *now* confess?"

"What am I to confess?" she languidly asked.

"That you murdered your child the moment it visited the light."

"The infant was still-born; and as I hope for Heaven, it was not mine."

"Hush! profane, lost woman! call not so sacred a witness to thine obstinacy and perjury. Officials, go on! let her torments be slow—slow and horrid; they will so change her, that none of human kind who shall behold her corpse, will own her for their species!"

Instantaneously the diabolical order was obeyed; a second time her every limb and nerve was strained to the very verge of death,

death, which she inwardly supplicated for. The most hideous contortions disfigured her face.

“ Will you confess?” again demanded the cardinal.

“ I have nothing to confess ; I am innocent of the charge.”

“ Tighter, tighter, officials ! with one pull tear every bone from its socket ! Go on, go on ! strain her eyeballs until they fly out of her head !”

“ In mercy stab me to the heart first ! Have ye not a dagger ?”

At this moment ten thousand daggers would have been welcome to her ; the rack seemed to outdo all its former tortures.

“ Will you confess ?” repeated the priest.

“ I will—I will !” she screamed, totally unable to endure for an instant longer their barbarous cruelties. “ Take me but  
from

from hence, or kill me with a blow, and ere I die I will confess all !”

“ Let go the ropes, and suspend the torture for the present,” said the cardinal to the officials.

“ Oh, unbind me ! for mercy’s sake unbind me !” implored the abbess.

“ No, no ; you quit not your present posture until we have extorted the whole truth, a single deviation from which plunges you into pangs a million times more excruciating than any you have yet felt. You acknowledge the child in question was *yours*.”

“ I do—I do !” she replied ; and as she thus was compelled to convict herself, a shower of tears fell from her. Her judges fancied them tears of contrition, but they remained unmoved.

“ And that you strangled it, to hide your disgrace ?”

“ Yes ! Now, now unbind me, I beseech you !” and again she screamed with agony.

“ Stay

“Stay this turbulent impatience. I repeat, you stir not thence until it is our pleasure that you do—we still have much and important matter in reserve. Did not a brother of one of the novices of St. Agnes visit the convent yesterday?”

“Yes.”

“Had you not an interview with him, when nobody else was present?”

“I confess it, reverend father, but it was for the purpose——”

“Silence!” interrupted the cardinal; “do you so soon forget yourself again? We *know* the purpose of it. It was for the vile——Not a word—it was, I say, for the vile and scandalous purpose of receiving a bribe, to aid his abandoned sister to elope with him. Speak to the fact.”

“Oh, Heaven, take pity on me!” she feebly articulated.

“Answer me,” said the cardinal.

That this was the work of treachery, of the most determined, the most deep-laid and atrocious villainy, was now too obvious

ous to the horrified Stephania to be doubted, and that the author of it was the terrible Constantia; for none—none else had she cause to suspect. Hitherto suspicion had slept, but it awoke now with one effort, and struck upon her heart and soul with paralysing coldness. She had long known the baseness of Constantia's disposition; but bad as she was—bad as she herself was, she had never suspected such a climax of wickedness in mortal. That this depraved woman hated her she well knew, but why she should have proceeded to such a frightful extremity to accomplish her destruction, was inexplicable to her. Yet, however inexplicable, however horrible, the deed was done. She was hurled into an abyss of ruin, and her doom, her appalling doom, was certain. Suspicion glanced at no other, else might she still have saved herself; then one chance of life had yet remained; but all—all in her mind was hopeless and dark despair, and she had nothing left but to submit to her fate. True, she might, by a word, possibly

bly avert that fate; Constantia's name, once uttered, would, like a potent spell, dissolve the whole mystery; but that fell enchantress had drawn a circle round her, beyond whose frightful verge she durst not step. Her oath, her fatal oath, bound her as firmly in the power of the nun, as the blackest charms of sorcery could have done, and perjury was an acme of crime her soul did not for a moment contemplate.

“ I *will* be answered !” furiously vociferated the cardinal. “ Were you not bribed, and did you not, unknown to the sisterhood, contrive her escape ? Deny it at your peril !”

It was indeed at her peril to deny it, for the officials were ready at a word to resume the work their souls delighted in, and “ tear,” as they had been commanded, “ her bones from their sockets.” The utmost strength of human nature would have sunk under a repetition of such barbarities.

barities. Stephania had seldom possessed much real firmness under sufferings, but it now completely forsook her, and the deluded woman sealed the fiat of her doom, in avowing herself guilty of all she was charged with, and the principal crime, one of the most atrocious that it came within their province to punish.

Nearly an hour had she been extended on the rack, and death appeared coming with rapid strides to terminate her misery; but now that they had forced from her her own conviction, they removed the chains, and placed her on a seat, where they were obliged to support her exhausted frame. She would have thrown herself on her knees, to thank Heaven that she had been taken from the rack; but the exertion was too much for her, and she fell back almost insensible.

“Thou shalt have time for prayer, unfortunate,” said the cardinal; “six hours yet  
yet

yet are left you, ere you enter on a future state ; for which, in the interval, God grant you may prepare ! Attend now with befitting solemnity, while I remind you of your awful situation, for longer than I have said, you have not to live. You are, by your own confession, a disgrace to the station you filled, to your sex, and to the whole human race. Hear me, baroness, your licentious and unbridled passions first triumphed over your reason, and led you into a guilty intercourse with man ; the fruit of your infamy you assassinated, hoping thereby to escape condign punishment. True, you did for a while escape it, but murder *cannot* long be hidden. The powerful hand of Providence hath at length drawn aside the veil that screened you ; still, still after that, repentance was far from you—you plunged headlong into a vortex of iniquity, and dragged with you, into the hideous gulf, two others, who had else been innocent, crowning your guilt by leading them on to sacrilege and murder.

murder. Oh, most miserable woman! the blood of all these be on your head—your doom is unalterable, but it is just. Hear now the sentence our laws compel me to pronounce upon you. You are to be re-conducted to your cell, there to pass the intermediate time in prayer and penance; from thence you are to walk barefooted to the scaffold, where the executioner will be in readiness to sever your head from your body, and may Heaven have mercy on your poor soul! Little more remains for me to say. The novice Clara, and the unprincipled partner of her flight, have already been tried and condemned; their death-warrant is made out, and I have only now to send it, with yours, to be signed by his majesty the king. At twelve to-night ye die!"

More than this *Stephania could not* hear; nature seemed to have rallied all her powers to hear the sentence out. The last words of her judge smote her like the iron  
hand

hand of death; with a frantic scream she fell from her chair, devoid of sense and motion, and in that state she was borne to her cell.

END OF VOL. III.

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# DE WILLENBERG;

OR,

## THE TALISMAN.

*A TALE OF MYSTERY.*

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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BY I. M. H. HALES, ESQ.

*AUTHOR OF THE ASTROLOGER.*

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Such is the weakness of all mortal hope,  
So fickle is the state of earthly things,  
That ere they come into their aimed scope,  
They fall so short of our frail reckonings,  
And bring us bale and bitter sorrowings,  
Instead of comfort, which we should embrace—  
This is the state of Cæsars and of Kings.  
Let none, therefore, that is in meaner place,  
Too greatly grieve at any his unlucky case. SPENSER.

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# DE WILLENBERG.

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## CHAPTER I.

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———Abash'd the tempter stood,  
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw  
Virtue in her shape how lovely!           MILTON.

**F**ROM the moment of their quitting the prison until they reached Warsaw, Theodore and Victoria had very little time to indulge reflections, but those that did obtrude were of the most gloomy and dispiriting nature, and our heroine wept afresh at the chilling prospect before her. Immediately after their arrival they were ordered to their trial, and led by an official to the hall of judgment: in every object

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that met their view they read their sentence, and the countenances of their judges, as they entered, confirmed it.

On rejoining Theodore, Victoria strove to rally back her fortitude, in order to inspire him with such to bear him through the awful ceremony, for almost every degree of it seemed to fail him; and she well knew that it was seeing her brought to such a place, and for such a purpose, that thus unmanned him. He was attired in deep mourning for his late father, and Victoria partly in the white dress she had worn at the altar of St. Agnes on the preceding day; and though sorrow and fretting had stolen the roses from their cheeks, yet in that sorrow there was a something that interested the heart in their favour, even more than the full bloom of health and happiness had done. In the rear came Conrad, his heart almost bursting with anguish as he looked round on every thing portentous of their fate.

“ Prisoners,

“Prisoners, what are your names, ranks, and places of abode?” was the first question put to them.

These they were predetermined not to reveal.—“Your eminence,” said Theodore, “is already in possession of our names—our ranks it is but mockery to demand, and avails us nought that you should know. You say we are amenable to your laws; if justice deals out those laws, rank should not bias you—to *justice* the meanest and the highest of his majesty’s subjects have an equal claim, and woe to the state where it is otherwise!—*This* is, alas! our present abode—it matters not whether the palace or the cottage was our former one.”

“Beware of such temerity, young man; we can put strong reins here on a haughty spirit,” was the cardinal’s only observation to him.

De Willenberg had *now* summoned all his fortitude, to go through a scene where so much was required; he knew he could

not refute the charges against him, and any equivocation, or attempt to do so, would instantly subject them all to the torture: but the magnitude of their danger seemed to nerve him with greater firmness, and there was something so dignified and determined in his manner, that admiration appeared to take place of severity in most of the assembly.

As they were not supposed to be much acquainted with the abbess, and any knowledge of her former actions being irrelevant to the matter in question, the next interrogatory was, by whom had they been assisted in their escape from the monastery?

It was impossible that De Willenberg could for an instant surmise that Stephania was implicated in this business, nor (already informed) did the others think his reply necessary to convince them. Constantia had done her worst; he despised her—he abhorred and shuddered at the recollection of  
of

of her horrible treachery and revenge; but now, in the midst of the worst dangers she could possibly menace him with, he no longer *feared* her—the fear of a higher Power was predominant in his bosom—a Power, compared to which all that is earthly sinks into insignificance; he feared not Constantia, neither did he now feel a wish to screen her from punishment; but, even at the moment when his eye turned with horror from the appalling rack on which he might possibly be stretched and tortured, still what were its worst tortures, compared to the violation of an oath such as his, so solemnly pledged?—the former could but affect the body—the latter was a crime against the soul. On the cross, the semblance of that on which his Saviour had suffered, he had unequivocally sworn that no circumstances which chance or design might ever throw him in the way of, should compel him to betray the nun; well did he remember the fatal words she had extorted from him—that oath was

sacred and irrevocable ; his resolution was not to be shaken, and he knew that Victoria would spurn life itself, if bought at the price of perjury and dishonour. His reply was firm and decisive.—“ Cardinal,” said he, “ that we have done that for which we were brought hither, admits of no contradiction ; that we received assistance from another—that, in our flight, we were opposed—nay more, that the one who ventured to oppose us fell by my hand, is equally undeniable : with all this you are already acquainted ; for the centinel, he rushed upon his own death ; of the one whose proffered aid we fatally accepted, I must withhold the name—I dare not reveal it.”

“ Dare you refuse to do so ?” asked the cardinal, sternly.

“ Yes, father, I *do* refuse—an oath most solemn seals my lips on the subject for ever : nay, your eminence must hear me further,” continued he, seeing the cardinal’s features grow darker and darker with anger,

anger, "for ye are bound to hear the truth, let it come to your ears in whatever shape it may. Ye here profess yourselves the ministers and teachers of the gospel; ye visit with unexampled rigour every offence against the tenets of that gospel: to fit you for the holy office, religion, free from all dangerous bigotry and sophistry, must dwell in your hearts. Ask *your* heart, cardinal, if religion is its inmate, would it not shudder to hear me break an oath made upon the cross—one of the most enormous sins that man can commit—that oath voluntarily and deliberately pledged? would it not shudder, I repeat? If *not*, then is your office but a sinecure, made up of superstition, hypocrisy, falsehood, and cruelty—and *religion* but a mask to veil it."

"Rash stripling, beware!" muttered the cardinal, and Victoria trembled with apprehension of the consequences of his unguarded warmth.

"What! does he presume to preach to

B 4

*us?*"

us?" exclaimed one of the priests, his little red face deepening with passion into a perfect crimson—"Away with him instantly to the rack;" and he tried to grasp the bell, in order to summon the officials.

"Softly, brother," interposed the cardinal—"we must not be precipitate; he hath but spoken the truth, which is ever welcome to our ears and our hearts, and meant not to offend against our dignity; besides, knowing already this name, we need not urge him to pronounce it."

Whenever Theodore was led to reason or moralize with another, he generally spoke, not alone to the ear, but to the heart, and he had done so now; to the cardinal's heart (for he had one) his words had brought conviction, and he internally felt the full force of them, though he wished not to acknowledge that he did so.—"Unhappy youth!" resumed he, "mistake not my lenity, for ye have nought but death to hope for. We *know* whose  
aid

aid ye had, therefore the name is now of little moment; the sacrilegious deed is done for which ye have been brought before us: but that is not all; you have not only to answer for the crime of stealing a novice from her convent—of the one you thus trepanned you were the professed *lover*, and, shocking to say, her *brother*; as if your guilt or your ruin yet was incomplete, you determined to make it sure, by steeping your hands in blood, in human blood—by plunging yourself into the hideous gulf of sin, until you had sunk to the bottom, never more to rise. Young man! young man! these are crimes of frightful magnitude, and neither from justice nor religion must either of you expect mercy.”

Here he paused a while—a fearful pause it was to our captives, for the next moment might reveal their fate; and, oh dreadful confirmation of their worst fears! the cardinal, in a tone of deep solemnity,

B. 5.

bade

bade them prepare to die that night. For the first time this obdurate man now seemed moved to pity, for, as he slowly pronounced the awful sentence, his eye rested on Victoria, whose lovely features rivetted his attention. She spoke not, she wept not, but her head drooped, and the beautiful innocence of her countenance spoke irresistibly for her—she looked like a suffering angel, all heavenly purity and meekness; and he passed a handkerchief across his eyes, to wipe away a tear that, spite of him, glistened there, while his tongue condemned to such a doom a being in appearance so fascinating, so perfect—even in her confessed guilt she seemed to him the loveliest work of nature. Soon, however, he withdrew his regards from her, for he was in reality too proud, and too tenacious of the austere dignity of his high office, to wish she should observe him thus affected; he even deemed the transient feeling of compassion a weakness unworthy of him, and, as if ashamed of it, the instant he took

took his eyes off her, he desired the secretary, in a firm voice, to write out the death-warrant in proper form, which the latter instantly set about.

De Willenberg's eyes had not ventured to encounter Victoria's during the trial; he heard his own condemnation with a degree of firmness and composure almost supernatural, but when *her* assumed name was pronounced, when *she* was included in the fatal mandate, then indeed every thing like firmness and composure fled from him—he rushed towards her, and clasped her to his bosom, while the tears he had so long violently laboured to repress flowed from him uncontrolled. Victoria now sobbed audibly—neither could utter a word, and they felt that but for their tears their overcharged hearts must have burst with agony.

One of the priests, more cruel and hardened than the others, not choosing to

B 6

have .

have it perceived that he possessed no feeling, rang for the attendant official, and desired him to reconduct them to their cells. Still absorbed in their grief, they saw him not until he came close, and attempted to separate them; De Willenberg seemed chilled with horror at his touch, and started, as from contagion.—“Avaunt, wretch!” cried he, furiously pushing him from him, while his eyes sparkled with rage at the sight of him; in an instant they softened into their natural expression, for before him stood Conrad, patiently expecting to hear himself condemned to a similar fate.—“Must *you* too die, my faithful fellow?” exclaimed Theodore—“no, no.” With a frantic wildness he addressed the council—“Cardinal, I conjure you, shed not this man’s blood; if *he* dies, ye will *all* have the sin of murder on your heads, for he is innocent of *our* offence—Heaven can witness that he is.”

“We have yet to ascertain that,” observed the little red-faced dignitary, whom  
De

De Willenberg's arguments had so highly offended; "your asserting that he is innocent does not prove him so; he must remain here and take his trial. Official, shew these other two prisoners to their respective cells immediately."

"Oh, Heavens! must we part so?" cried Theodore, again snatching Victoria to his breast; "will ye not in pity grant us, that the few short hours we have to live we may expend together?"

"No," roared the same priest, vehemently—"we cannot allow it."

"Recollect, father Manuel," said the cardinal, with haughty coldness—"recollect that *I* am the head of this court, not *you*.—Official, I command that the prisoners be thus indulged."

It was an indulgence which would not have been granted, had not the cardinal's pride been so roused, that, in malicious and open opposition to poor father Manuel, he determined to shew his superior authority;

authority; De Willenberg was aware of this, but did not hazard an observation, and bowing in silence to the decree of their inflexible judges, he and Victoria withdrew.

Never having known or heard of Conrad, Constantia had, of course, mentioned nothing of him in her letter; and the only charge against him now was, his having been found beside the convent gate along with his master. It had already been clearly proved that De Willenberg alone had attacked the centinel, and though the affectionate servant, to save him, would unhesitatingly have submitted to the accusation and the penalty, it was evident that to eriminate himself, so far from rendering his master any service, would decidedly frustrate the project he still had in view to save his life. After a long and minute investigation, his innocence being clearly and satisfactorily proved, they could not do otherwise than acquit him, nor, with

with all their unpitying cruelty, could they help expressing their admiration of his attachment and fidelity to his master.

On being liberated, he threw himself on his knees, fully trusting that the same Omnipotence who had willed his deliverance from that dreadful place, from whose punishments few ever escaped, would aid his laudable exertions to preserve De Wilenberg. He deemed it better not to see him at present, nor communicate what he was about to do, which might be only raising a hope that would be crushed ere long, and bring the hour of separation and death with tenfold agonies.

Our passions, our feelings, our sentiments, or, in short, any thing, having reached their height, their further progress must necessarily be to decline: such was the case with Theodore and Victoria, whose anguish, in its excess, had worn itself out, but was succeeded by that sickly lassitude

lassitude and depression that extreme grief almost always leaves behind. From this state, however, a sense of their approaching fate, and the necessity of properly preparing for it, soon recalled them: for this De Willenberg would have been better fitted, had his painful suspense relative to Conrad been at an end; but it now became almost intolerable, for those who had access to him either could not or would not give him any intelligence of him whatever; and he was at length compelled to believe that the faithful fellow had fallen a sacrifice to cruelty and injustice.

It was with much difficulty he could command his fortitude, at seeing the amiable, the gentle Victoria, wrapped in meek and religious submission, with all an angel's loveliness and piety, awaiting her deathblow—without a murmur, without a reproach, by word or look, awaiting that death which her love for him alone had brought her to. She had been for some time

time praying devoutly in a recess at one end of the cell; as she arose, a beautiful and seraphic smile of perfect resignation played over her countenance—there was a heavenly expression in her eyes, as if futurity itself had been revealed to her; never had she looked so truly lovely as at this moment. During her aspirations, De Willenberg had been absorbed in thought; and as she stood thus before him, he gazed on her for a few minutes with unspeakable admiration.—“And was such a one as this to be cut off by untimely and ignominious death? was such a one as this to die on a scaffold, by the hand of a public executioner? Forbid it, Heaven! forbid it, human nature!” suddenly exclaimed De Willenberg—“it shall never be.”

He started from his seat—a sort of wild and maddening joy was diffused over his features, unintelligible to Victoria—some sudden idea had flashed upon his mind—  
he

he looked as if it was a divine inspiration.—  
“ Oh, blessed, blessed thought !” cried he,  
with energy and enthusiasm—“ it comes  
upon my soul like a voice from heaven,  
giving me life, hope, and joy. Oh day—oh  
deed, never, never more to be forgotten !—  
Yes, my Victoria, I will yet preserve you  
—you shall live—we shall both live ; I will  
myself write to the king ; Augustus is  
every thing that *becomes* a king—he is  
just and merciful, and he will pardon us.”

Victoria's face had partaken of his ani-  
mation for an instant—the hope of life  
had warmed her bosom until she heard  
his last words, and then, even more quick-  
ly than it came, it vanished.—“ Write to  
the king !” she repeated—“ alas, Theodore,  
it will be totally unavailing : if *that* is our  
only chance, then all is over with us—it is  
like the effort of a drowning wretch grasp-  
ing a straw for safety—the king would  
heed it not.”

“ By my soul but he shall—he must  
heed

heed it. I will this very instant call for paper and ink, and write to him, let the result be what it may."

This he was hastening to do, when one of the officials, a man of conciliating appearance, and in whose bosom humanity was not yet extinct, entered, to inform them that his majesty had read and signed their death-warrants. It was what Victoria had expected, and she heard it with perfect calmness, while De Willenberg seemed to smile defiance to it.

In direct opposition to the will of the little priest, the cardinal had ordered this official to shew the prisoners every attention they required, until their last awful hour—an order to which he paid the most scrupulous obedience. Nature had apparently not intended him for his present office, but he was like many other individuals, who are often, by circumstances, forced into situations in life, high and low, which

which they are either too good or too bad to fill suitably. He felt, and he expressed commiseration that so young a couple should be doomed to a disgraceful death; but the king had decreed it, and he assured them that from the royal word there was no appeal.

Without making any comment on his intelligence, De Willenberg merely requested to be conducted back to his own cell for a while, which was in a different part of the building, and that the official would attend him there, on some business of importance.

When he was gone, our heroine sat in patient silence, without a hope, and almost without a wish to live; her only real regret now was, that in her last moments she should not receive the blessing of her beloved father, and this indeed brought to her heart one of its bitterest pangs.

She

She had not been many minutes left alone, when an attendant came in, and announced the arrival of a stranger of high rank, as his appearance denoted him to be, who demanded to see her—a privilege which, consistent with the orders, would not be refused. She had scarcely breath to desire that he might be admitted—her respiration was hurried, and she trembled with the agitation of mingled hope and fear: this stranger, as they termed him, might be her father; and how could she support an interview with him?

While thus she sat in fearful expectation and suspense, the door was again slowly opened, and a tall, dignified figure approached her: it was not her father, but Leopold, duke of Silesia.

Surprise for a few moments prevented her from speaking; she knew not how she ought to receive him, or whether she had cause to regret or to be glad that it was not  
not

not her father; but, in truth, such a visitor was unwelcome to her, and she could not wholly prevent her countenance from betraying her displeasure. He was, however, too much the courtier to notice this, and respectfully leading her back to her seat, he took one himself almost close beside her.

To a mind of sensibility and refinement, few things are more truly disgusting than (however well meant they may be) the commonplace cant and jargon by which the vulgarly-goodnatured part of the community express their sorrow and their sympathy at the sufferings of another—frequently without any real sentiment of the sort; nor indeed can we more effectually humble the victim of imprudence or misfortune, than by an ostentatious display of *pity* for his unhappy situation, or an unfeeling allusion to the circumstances that brought him to it.

Leopold

Leopold was a completely well-bred man of the world, and, in point of etiquette and delicacy, was almost always fastidiously scrupulous; and he now carefully avoided adverting to her indiscretion, knowing it would give her additional pain, though he afterwards hesitated not to inflict that pain in a different shape.—“Lady,” said he, “my presence here may excite your amazement—nay, it may be deemed presumptuous, until you know the purport of my visit; hear it then at once: I come to save your life.”

“And De Willenberg’s?” she demanded, with a wild cry of joy, while she blamed herself for harbouring a thought inimical to him for an instant. “Save my Theodore—can you do that?”

“Yes, lady Victoria, I can.”

The excess of her joy threw her into a sort of momentary delirium; she attempted, in the wildness of her gratitude, to throw herself at his feet, but he upheld her.—“Art thou indeed,” cried she—“art thou

thou an agent from above—the minister of Heaven, sent to perform its goodly works on earth? Who—who art thou, invested with such high authority? art thou the king himself?”

“ I am his brother. Surely lady Victoria should know me—I am the duke of Silesia. A word from me will save you.”

“ Then, I beseech your highness, speak it. What kind power guided your footsteps hither? what could tempt the brother of our sovereign to a place—a dreadful place, like this?—I pray you, pardon my agitation—such an honour I could not, in such a situation, be prepared for.”

“ Talk not of *honours* at such a moment as this; humanity, pity, the most powerful feelings of our nature, urged me to hasten to preserve two precious lives. The sentence hath been passed, lady, and the very warrant for your deaths has received the king's signature; so that the case admits of little delay—I must be prompt.”

“ Let

“ Let me recall De Willenberg,” said she, rushing in ecstasy towards the door to bid the official summon him—“ even now he left me. Oh, vain, childish hope in him, to sue for the royal pardon—to write to the king!”

“ *He* write to the king!” reiterated Leopold, while a contemptuous smile curled his lip; and detaining Victoria—“ No, lady, he must not be recalled; when I do good, it is my glory to do it privately: let him not know it till the thing is done; good fortune unexpected, is the sweeter, and will the more rejoice him.”

“ Nay, I do entreat your highness, let him come and share my joy—let him kneel with me to bless and pray for you; for myself, oh! it is—it is too much.”

“ If you insist, it must needs be so. But hear me yet a moment ere he comes. We must remain alone while I propose conditions for your safety—your compliance ensures your lives; and mark me,

lady Victoria," continued he, in an impressive voice that almost chilled her, "your *refusal* consigns you both to certain death."

"What are the terms your highness would propose?" asked Victoria, the ardour of her hopes somewhat damped at the idea of stipulation; "few are the conditions, consistent with honour and integrity, that, to save *his* life, I would not yield to. Say, duke, what would you?"

"Your heart and hand, fair lady. Nay, why start thus? why that look of displeasure?—lady Victoria Herman's countenance wears it but indifferently. The terms are easy, and are they not honourable? Promise me but these, and, ere two hours elapse, ye shall both be free: wealth, rank, and regal honours, shall be yours, Victoria, and the king's favour shall be Theodore's; *you* shall be duchess of Silesia—ay, I have said it, and *he* shall hold the highest post at court my interest can

can obtain for him. *These* are the conditions, and you cannot hesitate to accept them."

"Pardon me, duke," said she, colouring with resentment at such a proposal, and the confidence with which he urged it, "vanity has but little ascendancy over me; and those conditions, however flattering, splendid, or *honourable* they may be, I cannot hesitate to *reject*."

"Reflect for a moment; assuredly you are not so blind to your own interest—you would not rush headlong to death?"

"Let a few words at once undeceive your highness. I can *never* be your wife—*nothing* can induce me to comply; my vows are already plighted to another—to De Willenberg; in return, I received his. But for our love, sincere and mutual, we should not now be here; and think you, after all, I would prove faithless to him? if you do, you know me not—though you say, duke, I should know you."

"Is it the accomplished daughter of

count Herman who talks thus fancifully?" said Leopold, forcing a smile of incredulity—"no, no; let fabled lovers, heroines of romance; talk of the fealty they owe their lords—yes, let them heroically brave the direst blows of fate, and all the horrors of the poet's brain, mocking such dangers; but remember, lady," and again his voice sunk, "*their* dangers are imaginary—yours are *real*."

"Think you my sorrows of so light a nature that they may be sported with? or does your highness mean seriously what you propose?—This is a place, and this an hour, sir, to me so solemn, that such conversation is unbecoming—nay more—it is disgusting, illiberal, and unworthy the character Silesia's duke should bear."

The proud dignity of her voice and manner awed him for a moment, as she waved her hand to put an end to the subject; but soon recovering his effrontery, he proceeded—"Most seriously I mean it; hear me repeat them. Say you will  
abandon

abandon this romantic passion—for, pardon me, lady, I cannot otherwise designate it—say you will do this, or love De Wilenberg as you ought. Regard his life—still more, his honour; know that it is in your power to save him from a fate most ignominious—a terrible fate, that would overwhelm you both—*both*, did I say?—ay, the whole of your noble house, in endless shame: ye could not brook *disgrace*. Here is an alternative, and one that none but yourself would slight: consent to be my wife—to wear the honours that my wealth and rank will bring you—to have your brows graced with the magnificence of a ducal coronet; and, the instant your lips pronounce that promise, I depart, to claim his majesty's pardon for you both.”

Still our heroine continued firm.—“Duke,” said she, “let that pardon be withheld from us—let the next hour see us, even on a scaffold, breathe our last, ere I consent to this.”

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“And

“ And would you indeed consign the one you feign to *love* forsooth to public infamy—to a cruel death? Is *this* your boasted love for him?”

“ So well I love him, sir, that I would not resign the bliss of even in death being faithful to him for your whole dukedom. Now, what says your highness?”

“ Rather ask yourself, Victoria, what De Willenberg would say to such a proof of *love* for him as this; would he not, for his own sake, yield you to me?”

“ Too well do I know him to think so for an instant; and were I base enough to yield myself, Theodore would not live long to mourn my baseness.”

“ Use not so harsh a term for it; at best, it were to exalt yourself—at worst, it were but a copy of the world, where such things happen every day. Give up this Theodore, and receive in return the fondest heart that ever glowed within the breast of man; be not ungrateful for my proffered service.”

“ I thank

“ I thank your highness for so great an honour, but, on such terms, I must and do decidedly decline the service. Give up my Theodore!—at such a price I would reject your brother’s wide dominions. Surely, duke, a noble mind should ever find its own reward in the consciousness alone of doing a noble deed. Hear me now: I will *never* be your wife.”

“ You would marry De Willenberg then, I suppose—marry a beggar!—truly a worthy match for the heiress of Herman Castle!”

Indignation at his contemptuous and malignant expressions instantly crimsoned her cheeks.—“ Now, duke, know me at once,” said she, constraining herself to speak to him through her resentment; “ though poverty, in all its meagre horrors, stood frowning beside De Willenberg, to warn me from my fixed purpose with its frightful threats, still I should love him as I now do. Beside *you* stands gaudy splendour, arrayed in power, wealth, the

c 4

pomp

pomp of royalty, and all that can seduce mortal vanity, yet do I reject you; again and again I say it—I reject you.”

“ You will not be my wife—will not wear my coronet?”

“ Never.”

“ What would you say suppose I had your father’s promise for it?”

“ As I have said already—I would refuse.”

“ What! bid defiance to your father’s will, and brave *his* anger!—Now then, to put your courage to the test, know that I *have* received a promise from him—ay, from your father’s lips, that you should wed me. Now to this what say you?” As he said this emphatically, his face glowed with exultation at his expected triumph.

“ From my father!” she indignantly repeated—“ but no—your words, I think, are *false*; and were they not, still would I spurn your offers—were your love, your riches, rank, and titles, boundless all, still  
would

would I for ever reject you. Now, duke, you are answered; and now, knowing me unalterable, I pray your highness to depart."

Leopold rose to go; for a moment he stood abashed and confounded at her firmness—a conduct so wholly unexpected by him; but the ebullitions of his wounded pride were not to be controlled.—“Your wish shall be complied with, haughty lady,” said he—“I *will* depart; but, mark my words, your doom is now decreed—this very night you and *your Theodore* shall die: in the awful moments of death you will too late repent your romantic *love* and your unwarrantable resentment. Proud, scornful woman, farewell!”

Unfavourable suspicions relative to the duke, such as never had dawned upon her mind till now, were the consequences of this visit; and, however unpleasant such a communication might at this time be to De Willenberg, she felt it incum-

bent on her to make it known, and on that account the more anxiously wished for his return.

CHAP.

CHAPTER II.  
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In groundless hope and causeless fear,
Unhappy man! behold thy doom;
Still changing with the changing year—
The slave of sunshine and of gloom.

Dr. JOHNSON.

WE will now, after our long absence, re-visit Herman Castle, to see what has all this time been going forward there.

Doctor Wernheim's professional aid had been so eminently beneficial to madame Bertonville, that she was, in the latter part of the evening, perfectly composed, and able to converse with those around her. The interdict being removed that excluded all but one attendant, her first wish was to see the count her brother—a

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wish.

wish which he had fondly anticipated; and the moment it was communicated to him, he hastened, with little Henri, to her apartment. With transport that recalled the vivid glow of health to her cheeks, she folded to her bosom her darling boy, who, in the fullness of his joy, kissed and wept over her, until his agitation obliged him to retire.

When thus left alone together, they entered on the subject nearest to their hearts; and the countess anxiously inquired whether any intelligence of Victoria had yet arrived?

Hope still cheered the paternal bosom—hope that she lived, and would be restored to them—the expiring hope that Leopold had rekindled; and he informed his sister of the duke's visit, with the conversation that had passed between his highness and himself, leaving out all that related to the king. There were an energy and

and confidence in his manner of relating it, that implied a full reliance on Leopold's plausible and specious professions, and he could not help largely expatiating on the charms and the virtues of that beloved daughter, who had captivated the proud heart of Silesia's royal duke; in the enthusiasm of his love for her, he forgot all the pangs, forgave all the miseries her flight had caused him, and in happy anticipation spoke of her return. Widely different was the strain in which he expressed himself towards the calumniated De Wilenberg: he believed him false, dishonourable, ungrateful—believed that he had meditated an insult towards his illustrious house; and he spoke of him with the bitterest asperity, representing his supposed unworthiness in the clearest and the strongest light.

Madame Bertonville had more narrowly than her brother observed Leopold's character; she possessed a sound discriminating

ing judgment not easily biassed, and an accurate talent of developing the human disposition. She had seldom been more correct in her estimation of any one than of the duke, and with the view of him she had taken, she was far from being favourably disposed to receive his promises or assertions as founded on sincerity or truth; she had never much liked him, and she now liked him still less, for his having, however false or true his statement might be, prejudiced her brother against one who had appeared, and whom she had known to be in reality, amiable, generous, and deserving. She was, however, too tenacious of the count's happiness to throw out a word that might damp his hopes of having his daughter restored, and in truth she participated too much herself in those hopes to allow her to do so; but she nevertheless forbore to stimulate his expectations by mentioning how sanguine were her own; for those hopes, should they not be fulfilled, would, like a watch too highly wound

wound up, in a moment fall from their height, and sink him into the extreme depth of despair. Victoria's marriage with Leopold, exalted as was his rank, was the last thing she would have consented to; but it was yet only a conditional agreement; and she trusted that, should her niece indeed return, it might be, with little difficulty, avoided altogether.

The evening was now rapidly closing, and none of those who had been sent in quest of De Willenberg had yet returned. This excited fresh alarm at the castle, and for some hours the count continued at a window that overlooked part of the road, from which he every moment expected to behold the corpse of him who was once so dear to him, and whose memory, in spite of himself, he still loved and cherished. A train of recollections ensued, at once pleasing and painful—recollections of De Willenberg's days of youth, innocence, and happiness, when, with the lovely little
Victoria,

Victoria, he had frisked about, in sportive merriment and delight, beneath those beautiful plantations his eye now wandered over: their shades, alas! would behold such scenes of happiness no more.

At length a body of men appeared in the distant perspective: he watched them with intense steadiness, until they had almost reached the gates; in vain had his eye sought the body of Theodore, in vain looked for Conrad amongst them, and he hurried down to demand the cause from the others. Horror and consternation in their blanched features foretold that something disastrous and uncommon had occurred; they all seemed labouring to speak, and full of awful intelligence; and one of them at length gaining utterance, detailed elaborately the events of their journey.

Superstition, and an implicit belief in the marvellous, had ever held an unlimited ascendancy over their uncultivated minds,

minds, and never had superstition a more ample theme than the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Conrad. They had proceeded far beyond the wood into which he had turned with his master ere they missed him, and even then the remainder of their way was so interspersed with trees, that it occasioned little alarm until they reached the forest; on the borders of it they stopped for a while, not one of them having in reality the slightest wish to enter it—it was thought wholly improbable that Conrad would have ventured into such a place unaccompanied, even in the broad light of day; and some of them, glad of any excuse to delay proceeding, rode up and down, calling on their lost companion for a considerable time; but the echo of their own hoarse voices was the only answer they received.

Wearied by this fruitless exertion, they at length made up their minds to explore the forest—an undertaking which, in their
own

own opinions, was no trifling proof of their courage, leaving *duty* out of the question, though the latter was in fact by much the more powerful stimulant, as their loud ejaculations to Heaven for its protection, and exhortations to their comrades to stay by them, if any thing should happen, or they should meet any of the banditti, bore testimony to; but vain was the search—no Conrad—and, almost to their joy, no corpse was to be found; and, still better, they had not yet encountered a bandit, or a human being of any description.

They were now unanimously of opinion that Conrad had disappeared by some means not quite natural, and that the infernal power whom they fully believed to be the deity of the forest, had borne away the body of De Willenberg from mortal view for ever. This opinion was strengthened yet more as they penetrated the interior, where they found themselves enveloped

veloped in clouds of smoke, which almost obscured the sky, whenever an opening amongst the trees gave them a partial glimpse of it.

Panic-struck, they remained for some time stationary, until a huge volume of fire, illuminating the whole surrounding atmosphere, drew their attention towards the castle, which the raging element had by this time more than half destroyed. Ascending a steep acclivity, they had a full view of the magnificent and awful scene; the fire burned with uncommon clearness and brilliancy—its blazes sometimes appeared to reach the very heavens; and the expanse of heat, glowing and insufferable, forbade the idea of a nearer approach.

How to account for the tremendous conflagration they knew not; and having seen the castle sink in a few hours beneath its fate, they turned towards home, giving
up

up every idea of beholding Conrad in this world again.

The count was far from concurring in any of their extravagant opinions on the subject, though at the same time he could not but be seriously alarmed about Conrad, who, it seemed most reasonable to conclude, had entered the forest alone, and at a great distance from the others; and being attacked by banditti, had immediately fallen a victim to his temerity. The night was, however, now so far advanced that nothing further could be done at present, and the count withdrew for a few hours to his uneasy couch, to water it again with his tears.

With the impression of so many dreadful events on his mind, it was impossible that he could easily sink into repose; his mind was a wild chaos of horror, hope, and apprehension—and hope was by much the least prevalent. What had he to hope
from

from his interview with Leopold, more than the mere possibility that Victoria lived? and, if so, why had he not set out himself in search of her, instead of leaving to a stranger the task that best befitted a father? Yet how could he have left his sister in so precarious a state as she had been in during the day?—A certain air of incredulity in madame Bertonville, when he had informed her of the duke's visit and the purport of it, and which he had not noticed at the time, now that he gave way to reflection, forcibly struck him, and for a while inclined him somewhat unfavourably towards his highness; but there had been an apparent sincerity about him, the recollection of which repelled suspicion; and believing him to be the amiable and disinterested friend he appeared, sleep at length stole imperceptibly over his senses, and wrapped him in dreams pregnant with events as happy as those of life had ever been.

Languid

Languid and unwell, he awoke at an early hour. It was his intention to set out this morning in quest of Victoria, yet *where* he ought to seek her with any chance of success, he knew not; this intention he communicated to the countess, who could suggest nothing satisfactory; and while they were thus deliberating, the return of Conrad was announced to them by one of the wondering domestics.

The first person whom Conrad met in the castle was Barbara, to whom, in a few words, he hastily related all that had happened during their separation. She was ready to assail him with a torrent of questions, for the sight of her lover returned in safety, after escaping from such dangers, gave a fresh stimulus to her tongue, which indeed seldom required any excitement from art. No pencil but the masterly one of Hogarth could accurately describe the expression of her features on her hearing that De Willenberg was alive—she uttered

ed her astonishment in loud exclamations of thanks to Heaven; but the recollection of what a situation he was now in, along with her dear young lady, soon acted as a check upon her wild joy—in the prisons of the consistory, from whence their departure would probably be to the scaffold; for, however sanguine Conrad was, she saw no chance of their being saved. She asked him innumerable questions relative to them, their trial, the forms of the consistory, and all the horrors of that formidable court; but such interrogatories being now ill-timed, he waited not to reply to them, but hastened to make known the whole affair to count Herman. He found his lordship waiting in the saloon to receive him, but without the slightest expectation of what he was to hear.

“ My good Conrad,” said he, “ I am indeed rejoiced at your return, for I have passed a night of agonizing suspense, thinking you devoted to some terrible
fate

fate in your search after your poor master's body. Tell me, tell me, have you found it? have you conveyed it hither?"

"Yes, my lord count, I *have* found my dear master, and Heaven permitted too that I should find him alive."

"What say you, Conrad?" demanded the count, starting from his seat, as if electrified by the sound—"your master living!—Heard I aright? Answer me again."

"It is the truth, my lord—he *does* live; and so also does your noble daughter, the lady Victoria."

For the last few hours every hope of this had again abandoned the desponding bosom of the count, though he had been on the point of proceeding to traverse the surrounding country in search of her; and, unprepared as he was for the intelligence, excess of sudden joy at the certainty that she lived, almost deprived him, at the moment, of reason.—"You have seen my child then—the darling idol of my soul. She

She lives!—Where—oh, where is she?—where is De Willenberg?” Regardless of the disparity of their ranks, in the ardour of his gratitude to the one who had told him this, he threw himself on Conrad’s neck and wept abundantly, sobbing as if his full heart was ready to bound from the place that nature had assigned it.—“But where are they?” he again demanded; “say, thou messenger of joy and gladness, say where are my children—my Victoria, my Theodore? for still, still I will call him mine.”

What a blow was there in reserve for his highly-wrought feelings, to whirl them at once from the summit to which the first few words had wound them!—what a task was Conrad’s, to inflict that blow—to stun him with the intelligence that those two beloved children were imprisoned in the consistory—capitally convicted, and under sentence of death! yet he must be told; better surely that he should know it now,

than when it would be too late for human means to save them. Conrad had not been brought up in a court—he was ignorant of its hypocritical mummeries and formalities; true to nature, nature alone was his guide. He related every circumstance from the moment of meeting his master; he varnished not his detail, but told it with the honest simplicity and pathos of a kind, good, and affectionate heart.

The count heard him to the end with extraordinary firmness; tears rolled rapidly down his cheeks, but he did not sink beneath the blow—his presence of mind forsook him not, and here indeed it was necessary. Ordering his carriage to be instantly got ready to convey him to Warsaw, he hastened to inform madame Bertonville, and then prepared to go in person to the king, to have repealed, if possible, the dreadful sentence passed on De Willenberg and Victoria.

CHAP.

CHAPTER III.
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Had we never lov'd sae kindly,  
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,  
Never met, or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.      BURNS.

IN proportion as De Willenberg's hopes had been sanguine as to the probability of obtaining the royal pardon, so was he now depressed on returning to Victoria; disappointment weighed heavily upon his mind, and once more he began to despair.

Victoria read in his looks what he tried to say, but had not courage to question him; she had foreseen disappointment, and thought it sufficiently painful, without aggravating it by inquiries.

“ Nothing but sorrow waits upon my steps, Victoria,” said he, mournfully; “ hope hitherto, like a meteor, with its delusive glare, led me through all the labyrinths of adverse fortune; and, alas! at what a crisis hath it deserted me!—But I will trust to it no more.”

“ Has your application to the king then been in vain?” she asked.

“ To the king I have made *no* application—it is not permitted me. True, I wrote my letter; but it were the same had I never written it—never thought of writing it—none would be the bearer of it: I begged—entreated, on my knees entreated the official to have it conveyed to his majesty; but all was in vain—not even the offer of money could tempt him; he is resolute in his duty.”

“ Term him not resolute—he is obdurate; he hath no heart—although he wears the outward form of man, he is not such, but some pitiless monster of another species, to whom nature, in one of her capricious

cious moods, gave human shape. *Why* refused he to convey it?"

"Nay, do not thus censure him, my love—he but acts in strict conformity with his duty; it was the stern command of the king himself, when he gave his royal sanction for our deaths, that no further communication to him on the subject should be allowed—that none should presume to seek forgiveness for us, saying our crimes deserved no thought of pardon."

"Cruel, cruel tyrant!" exclaimed Victoria; "can he hope that, on the last awful day, when, in rank no higher than than ourselves, he shall rise with us from the tomb to hear the last sentence passed on all—can *he* expect that mercy from *his* Judge which he denies to us?—Is there no possibility of access to him?"

"None whatever; he quitted Warsaw about an hour ago—it is supposed, for his summer palace, and returns not until near midnight. Where may we be then?"

"If not on earth, in heaven, I trust," said Victoria, calmly, as she raised her beautiful eyes towards the bourne of her soul's expectations.

"Surely you are destined for heaven, if ever mortal was," observed Theodore, gazing on the majesty of her figure—"yes, my Victoria, that hope—a blissful one it is—is all that is now left us; and all this world seems as nothing to it. We will prepare to die as becomes us, for God is merciful, though man dares to be otherwise."

In how short a space of time had these unhappy events followed each other!—how mysterious were the links that successively connected them!—But a few short days ago, pleasure and joy had hovered round them in their most inviting forms, "adding to mutual love their loveliness"—the goddess of felicity appeared to have taken up her abode in Herman Castle; but soon had she passed away,  
and

and with her the shades that danced in her airy train—reversed and dismal was the scene now. All had originated from madame De Willenberg's letter, and the forgery which it alluded to.

In the midst of these sufferings Theodore could not forget the *cause*—he could not forget the misfortunes which his flight from the castle had been productive of, for those misfortunes were now before his eyes; neither could he forget the wrongs that had been heaped upon him. He now unbosomed himself to Victoria (for an explanation, even thus late, was a duty he owed her); he stated to her the nature of those wrongs—detailed the contents of his mother's letter, with his own subsequent proceedings respecting the one written in his name, that had destroyed all his bright prospects, and the almost-fatal consequences by which they had been followed.

Victoria was shocked and terrified at  
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the recital of the perils he had encountered. All these circumstances, when considered, served to render her unfavourable impressions of the duke of Silesia still more firm; and, however absurd such an idea might have hitherto appeared, she now could not help thinking that he was, in some way or another, though remotely, the author of all that had befallen them; and this opinion she did not hesitate to impart to De Willenberg. The latter only required such a suggestion to strengthen a similar opinion of his own: from various causes he had long suspected, if not, in some instances, clearly known, Leopold to be his bitter enemy; but if hitherto he had suspected him on strong and palpable grounds, his thoughts of him were now no longer mere suspicions—all was plain and undeniable certainty, for Victoria had informed him of his highness's visit, the proposals he had made her, and the determined repulse she had given him. The graceful modesty in which her words were veiled

veiled could not conceal the magnanimity of her soul, or the unshaken sincerity of her affection for De Willenberg.

The delightful consciousness of being so beloved by the only woman on earth he thought worthy of loving, at first stayed the torrent of resentment against the duke; but when it found way, it was truly loud and awful to behold.—“ At length,” cried he—“ at length the mystery is solved, and thus the truth bursts through the clouds of dark and vague conjecture that so long obscured it. This then is the man—ay, this the brother of our sovereign, who would *rival* me—this is the base villain who falsely, and for his treacherous purposes, proclaimed my death; *he* wrote the fatal letter that led us to our ruin—he is the cause of our guilt, and on his devoted head be the full weight of it! Oh! must we suffer for what his arts have occasioned?—Call they this *justice*?—no, no—it

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is

is cruelty, inhumanity. They dare not put us to death. The king shall know it all; I *will* demand our pardon; he shall know our wrongs—from my own lips he shall know them, and justice *shall* be done.”

“ But a few minutes ago, my Theodore, said you not that access to the king was impossible? and how, when things are come to such a desperate pitch, and he even far from Warsaw—how could you gain admittance to his presence? Has he not forbidden the approach of any one who would dare to mention us?”

“ Oh, Victoria! he knows not who we are—he is ignorant of the real names of those he has condemned; but he shall know them. About twelve to-night he returns to the palace; he must, in his way, pass the place of execution, and see us mount the scaffold—a lesson fit for royalty itself; then shall he hear me—then I will tell aloud his brother’s baseness—then the  
general

general voice, as loud, will call for justice; that will be the time to *prove* him just, by proving him impartial."

"Yet what if our conjectures should be wrong, and Leopold not be, as we suspect, the author of that letter?"

"Conjectures! I tell you we have confirmations 'strong as proofs of holy writ'—doubt it not; the one who would take advantage of my fall to crush me farther—to wrest from me your love, that love which constitutes the last spark of life—he who would rob me, who would thus degrade me, would go still farther, and degrade *himself*."

"But *what* certain proof have we that he wrote it?—on mere suspicion we dare not allege so foul a crime against him. This is a slender hope."

"Oh, hope, once more come to my soul," exclaimed De Willenberg—"come, and uphold my drooping spirit!" Sudden joy animated his features—"If that should fail, still have I a resource—a potent charm

—a little talisman, which will throw wide open to us the gates of mercy, and shew the nearest passage to his heart: it shall so touch every spring of that heart, that he will bid us *live*.”

“ Alas, Theodore ! what fresh fantasies are these that thus unfit you for death?— Do not, do not yield to them.”

“ They are no fantasies, believe me. Think, if you will, that I deal in mystery or magic, but of this at least be assured— if common means procure not our pardon, and all else should fail to save our lives, then, quick as lightning, and with magic power, the talisman shall do it.”

His voice, his manner, his words, all indeed were mystery deep and unfathomable to Victoria, who fixed on him for a moment the sort of doubtful look of amazement and inquiry, with which she would have regarded the agent of some unearthly dealer in sorcery and witchcraft. —“ What mean these strange expressions, De Willenberg?” said she.

“ They

“ They mean much, but to explain them now were to dissolve the charm; let it work this miracle and explain itself.”

He would unveil his obscure purposes no farther; and an official now came in, to announce to them that, in two hours hence, a confessor would attend, to prepare them with his holy counsel for the last journey of mortal—to the tomb.

The clanging of a clock at a distance informed them that the day was rapidly on the decline, for they had no other means of knowing the hour; thick walls, without any sort of division or opening but the door, rendered their cell totally impervious to the light of the sun, which was by this time sinking from the horizon, and the waning of a solitary lamp that glittered in a corner told that several hours had elapsed since their trial, and but a few more were to intervene until they would be summoned to the block.

De

De Willenberg sat for some time in pensive silence, with his eyes fixed on the quivering light, while the dismal retrospect of the last few days was present to his mind. He had nearly forgotten the important packet, which he now recollected, and the words of the mask forcibly recurred to him; he had strictly obeyed the injunctions of that mysterious being—no curiosity had tempted him to open it; he had been solemnly charged *never* to do so, unless circumstances should render it necessary—unless his *life* should be again attempted; and, wonderful coincidence! as if such an event had been anticipated, his life was now endangered: the momentous time was arrived when the interdict was removed—its contents must be unfolded to his knowledge, and the veil beneath which circumstances had wrapped themselves, must now be drawn aside; this, therefore, was the hour for him to inspect it, for his very life perhaps depended on what he was to read within.

He

He had drawn it from its concealment, and seated himself with Victoria beside the lamp, in order to peruse it, when his hand was arrested by the sound of approaching footsteps. Hastily replacing it, he sat in expectation of the entrance of somebody, and presently afterwards Conrad made his appearance. This was one whom he had almost despaired of ever seeing again, and he shook his hand with affectionate joy—nay, he was even inclined to think favourably of his judges for having acquitted him.

Conrad, in the honest enthusiasm of his heart, told them that he had done much towards saving their lives; he took it for granted that the king would not utter a refusal to count Herman's petition to have them spared. In a few words, he related his having, immediately on being liberated, hastened to the castle, and told the whole affair circumstantially to the count, considering that it would be criminal to  
keep

keep it longer a secret from any motive whatever; that his lordship had repaired directly afterwards to Warsaw, to demand an interview with the king, and would very soon arrive at the prison to see themselves. From this, however, his majesty's absence from the capital left nothing to hope for, and on one other resource alone Theodore now relied—their fate depended on the power of the talisman.

Conrad had obtained the cardinal's permission to be near his master for the remainder of the time, and for that purpose had been accommodated in an apartment belonging to one of the officials, whither he withdrew to await the arrival of count Herman.

Victoria was so agitated on hearing that her father was about to visit them there, that, for a considerable time after Conrad was gone, neither of them had courage to attempt the perusal of the packet. It contained

contained a brief summary of some of the principal events which we shall, in our own words, detail at large in the following chapter.

**CHAP.**

## CHAPTER IV.



Take physic, pomp—

Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,  
And shew the Heavens more just. — —

— — — — —

He is a great Observer, and he looks  
Quite through the deeds of men. SHAKESPEARE.

ERNESTINE, prince of Gallicia, was the only son of one of the kings of Poland before the subjugation of that country, and, of course, heir-apparent to the crown. Early in life his disposition developed itself: he was a young man of uncommon and brilliant talents, full of the follies, the weaknesses, and many of the vices that have characterized princes of more modern times; and his rank and vast wealth enabled

abled him to indulge in all the luxuries, dissipations, and sensualities, which he was by nature prone to the enjoyment of. His manners were graceful, elegant, and highly polished, insomuch that he was universally acknowledged to be the most accomplished gentleman in the kingdom. His person was, in his younger years, remarkably handsome and dignified, though, in after times, its beauty degenerated too much into the *embonpoint* to be admired; and his vanity—a failing which he possessed to a most unreasonable degree, was flattered by cringing courtiers and sycophant ministers, eager, for their own interest, to ingratiate themselves with the royal personage who was one day to be their sovereign. With the other sex he was already the reigning favourite, and gallantries in numerous quarters, though with little distinction of rank, very soon added to the attractions and the eclat of his character, of which it may easily be concluded that morality formed, if any, but a very small portion,

portion, though it seemed some consolation to him that he was surrounded by those who possessed quite as little, if not less, than himself. Upon his inclinations he put no restraint—his every passion, no matter what, was indulged, no matter how; all that nature and art could supply was at his command, to gratify his most inordinate and extravagant wishes. Such was the consequence of his evil genius, leading him early into corrupt society, disgraceful and far beneath him.

But this only lasted a few years, while his income was ample and adequate to it, and while the whole nation groaned under the taxations that supplied him. Unbounded prodigality, and the infatuating pleasures of the gaming-table, at length exhausted his stores, the people would submit to no further oppressions, and his propensities being yet unconquered, the accumulation of debts to an enormous amount was the result.

His

His affairs wearing so serious an aspect, and his father being unable to liquidate those debts from his private purse, it was suggested to him by the friends of the crown, that to unite himself in marriage to some wealthy princess was the most politic step he could take, and the only thing that could furnish him with the means of refunding the vast sums he had borrowed from the neighbouring nobility and others. Wedlock he had ever considered as a galling chain, and he recoiled from the proposal, because it must in some measure act as a check upon his wild and libertine passions, which had hitherto known no control; but matters were now come to a desperate pitch—his debts were daily increasing, and, urged by the absolute necessity of the measure, he yielded to their arguments, and consented to receive, as his wife, whomsoever they should fix upon.

The heiresses of several foreign courts  
were

were named, and amongst those whom Ernestine had never yet seen, was the princess Seraphina, daughter of the grand duke of Tuscany—a young lady amiable and accomplished, though not at all handsome. Seraphina was the object of their unanimous choice, for her dowry was said to exceed that of any other princess in Europe; and proposals for her union with the prince royal of Poland were forthwith sent to the court of Tuscany, and finally acceded to.

It was the wish of the duke her father, that the nuptials should be celebrated at his own palace, and this being respectfully signified to the illustrious suitor, he repaired thither, and received his bride from the grand duke's hand.

To this union political motives had influenced each party; her immense fortune was the great inducement to Ernestine, and the necessity of love and affection to  
constitute

constitute his happiness in the marriage state, he had not once thought of. From a match thus formed little domestic felicity was to be expected; Ernestine had been accustomed to revel in the society of the most beautiful, and many too of the most profligate women of the age; he was himself a profligate, and the modest, unassuming virtues of Seraphina, were ill suited to his depraved taste. A thousand times he execrated his past follies, that had compelled him to enter into this state of bondage; but it was a state within the limits of which he did not long confine himself.

Having brought her over to visit the country of which she was to be queen, they returned, after a short stay, to Florence, where one of the duke's magnificent palaces was ready for their reception, they having promised, in compliance with his wish, to fix their principal residence in that city, until Ernestine should be called to the throne. There temptation again  
assailed

assailed him in all its former shapes, and this weak, undisciplined prince, unable to resist it, was once more borne down the stream of vice and libertinism. Home was a desert to him, for there he dared not introduce his licentious companions; the society of the princess was irksome, for she was sensible, prudent, and religious. In the absence of the grand duke he neglected his amiable and uncomplaining wife, and twice she became a mother, whilst the unnatural father of her offspring was feasting in the wanton embraces of a mistress. The halls of that stately edifice, which had hitherto heard only the sounds of festivity and joy, now witnessed nothing but the secret sorrows and tears of Seraphina. Such, after the splendid fortune she had brought him, was the return of a worthless man to an exemplary and affectionate wife: a case, alas! not unparalleled.

Whilst Seraphina was engaged in the  
early

early education of her two sons, Augustus and Leopold—a task to which her great acquirements rendered her fully competent, her royal husband was devoting his hours to the company of his fair courtesan, the signora Velasco—a woman devoid of every honourable principle—proud, wicked, and ambitious, and vain of the complete ascendancy she had gained over her high-born lover. The fruit of this illicit intercourse was a son, the copy of his mother in features and in mind. His birth was a source of infinite joy to the signora, but Ernestine trembled lest by any chance it should come to the knowledge of the grand duke, who would not fail to resent such an insult and an injury to his daughter as it deserved.

These apprehensions, however, very soon gave umbrage to the haughty frail one, who, with pride and indignation swelling her bosom, insisted at first, that as her son was a *prince*, he should enjoy the privi-

leges of his rank, and as such be brought up.

Alarmed at thinking what the consequences of her ambition might be, should she persist in a claim of so dangerous a tendency, the only chance he saw of evading it was in contributing, as liberally as an overflowing purse would allow, to her own support, and the splendid adornment of her beautiful person, besides promising that the little Ferdinand should receive a first-rate education, and a fortune equal to his wants.

The offer of a sumptuous establishment, and a large independent income for life, was indeed a tempting one; yet her aspiring soul panted to behold the child she had given existence to nursed in the lap of rank, and honoured with the titles and the homage due to royalty. *Self* was, however, always predominant in her thoughts, which banqueted on the glowing picture

Ernestine

Ernestine drew of the consequence she would derive from such an accession of fortune, the triumph it would afford her, the envy and jealousy it would infallibly excite in her own sex, and the admiration it would give rise to in the other.

Anxiety for the aggrandizement of her son was for a while the ruling passion, but the selfish vanity of her heart triumphed over it, and she consented to receive the means of gratifying that vanity, and to let Ferdinand be sent to a distant school; with this stipulation on the part of the prince, that when his father's death should summon him to wield the sceptre of Poland, and he must consequently separate from her altogether, neither she nor her son should ever seek any further recognition or advancement.

This arrangement having been made, Ferdinand, to whom the title of count Velasco was granted, commenced his studies.

dies. Nature had bestowed on him many of her choicest gifts; but when she is thus lavish of her favours, she generally throws a shade over their vivid colouring, as if fearful of bringing mortal too near perfection. He was in person dignified and manly; his handsome and expressive features bespoke an innate consciousness of those exterior qualifications that gained him the admiration of his companions, over whom he had acquired a superiority that he took care to preserve: haughty and arrogant, he could brook no opposition to his will; but he was withal brave, enterprising, and courageous: the trifling and frivolous amusements by which youth is generally fascinated seemed far beneath his talents, and he viewed the childish occupations of some of his schoolfellows with sovereign contempt; even in his infancy he manifested a spirit valorous and heroic; his chief delight, after the lessons of the day were over, was to range his little companions into bands to represent  
soldiers,

soldiers, of which he was always the head-commander, in their playful battles the conqueror, and in their *civil* and *military* disputes the arbiter. The mystery of his birth, which was a secret to all but his preceptor, excited various surmises; but even his most intimate associates held him in too much awe to venture an inquiry on the subject, and his title of count Velasco, though never before heard of, still remained undisputed; but many guessed him to be the illegitimate offspring of some person of high rank. He prosecuted his studies with the utmost assiduity and attention, and his attainments in literature were fully commensurate to his extraordinary thirst for knowledge.

Hitherto he had never been permitted to see his royal brothers, Augustus or Leopold; but about the time that he had completed his education, a casual circumstance happened, which introduced him to the latter, who had heard the whole story

of his father's infidelity to his nuptial vows.

Arnold, the son of the woman who had been Ferdinand's nurse, wishing to better his condition, and, as he termed it, to see the world, entered the service of prince Leopold as his personal attendant, having heard of the situation by chance. Neither Leopold nor he had ever seen each other before, but both this prince and his servant, though so widely different in their stations, were perfect counterparts in disposition; Leopold was almost a copy of his father, dissipated, licentious, and ungovernable—and Arnold was entirely the creature of his vices and caprices. He was rather habitually than naturally vicious; gratitude bound him to Leopold, if that sentiment may be termed such, which attaches even the most depraved to a benefactor, though he be a villain; for the latter, to secure his attachment and faithful services, supplied all his necessities with

with a liberal hand, and settled on him a handsome salary. The man was thus taught not merely to countenance, but to admire and imitate the bad qualities of his master. Whose is the breast so base, in which an obligation conferred, by even an enemy, will not engender some portion of gratitude, though his very favours and benefits wear the darkest stamp of vice? Arnold afforded a striking instance of the ascendancy of that powerful feeling over minds otherwise the most perverted, for, notwithstanding his faults, he was sincerely devoted to him.

The first proof of the confidence that subsisted between them, was Arnold's disclosure of prince Ernestine's amour with the signora Velasco, and the existence of their son Ferdinand. Leopold, fired at the indignity offered to his illustrious mother, would at first have sought some means of resenting it, but policy forbade this idea, and he abandoned it. He soon

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expressed

expressed a wish to be introduced to the young count Velasco, and to cultivate an acquaintance with him—an introduction which Arnold readily undertook to bring about, and shortly afterwards accomplished.

The brothers were mutually pleased with each other—they met privately at every opportunity—their tastes and inclinations were similar; and a lasting friendship was cemented between them, which was carefully preserved from the knowledge of all except Arnold.

The decease of the king of Poland now called Ernestine to the enjoyment of sovereign dignities; as the monarch of that kingdom, it was wholly disallowable that he should reside in another; accordingly he prepared to bid farewell to Florence, and, with his long-neglected consort, to mount the throne of his ancestors—an honour which he would rather have shared with any other woman than Seraphina.

The

The artful blandishments of the signora Velasco had so completely ensnared his affections, that any thing short of the splendour of such an elevation would hardly have induced him to abandon her—pay, such was their reluctance to separate, that he was on the point of proposing to her to accompany him secretly into Poland—a proposal which she would unhesitatingly have taken advantage of. Love and prudence were long at variance in his bosom, but the latter happily gained the victory; he was now about to be exalted to a height where the eyes of a whole nation would be fixed upon him—the most conspicuous individual in the realm, he could not expect that his actions, of whatever nature, could escape general observation, and wisely sacrificing his affection to the necessity of decorum, he resigned his fascinating mistress for ever. He left her not, however, without making an ample settlement on her, and furnishing Ferdinand with a large supply of money,

ney, but on the again-specified proviso, that he must never expect to be recognised, and that all claims between them were to be totally at an end.

To this Ferdinand readily agreed, for the voluptuous pleasures and gaieties of Florence had attached him to that city, where he determined to remain amongst his dissolute companions, while he possessed the means of mingling in the vortex of dissipation in which he saw all around him plunged.

Very different were the conditions on which Leopold took leave of him. It was fixed that they should keep up a clandestine correspondence at regular intervals, which would be the more practicable, as he (Leopold) was, instead of going with the king to Poland, about to be sent into Germany, for the purpose of finishing his education there, under the superintendence of a father of the church, of eminent literary

literary attainments and abilities. Thither he soon commenced his journey, and at the same time the king, the queen, and prince Augustus, who was now next heir to the crown, departed for their dominions.

To the young and inexperienced, the absolute command of money is always dangerous, and often fatal, more especially if to inexperience is added either a weak or a vicious principle. This was exemplified in Ferdinand, who had now emerged into the world of folly and depravity, without restraint, without fear either of God or man; his partial mother indulged him in every thing—she laughed at his indiscretions, feigned blindness to his vices, and, in short, might be said to have thus completed his ruin. The consequence was, not that he loved her, for he had withal sense enough to perceive that she was a worthless and bad-hearted woman, but that she forfeited every portion of respect from him; and giving up his whole

E 6

time

time to the society of the most abandoned of both sexes, he became at length equally abandoned himself.

Too late the signora repented her conduct: she beheld her son on the verge of poverty and starvation—in the giddy-hey-day and thoughtlessness of her vain career, she had neglected to make any provision for him—she had brought him up to no profession, and she dared not think of encroaching further on the bounty of the king, who would doubtless spurn an application so unreasonable, and which she might have so easily avoided, if guided by common sense, prudence, or foresight.

Whilst contemplating the wreck she was partly the cause of, she was suddenly seized with a fever, whose progress was so rapid and malignant, as to leave no hope whatever of her recovery; the predictions of her medical attendants were verified, and in three days from the commencement

ment of the attack, she was no more.— Before she expired, Ferdinand was summoned to her deathbed; the scene was truly an affecting one, and such as might have drawn tears from a stoic; hardened indeed must he be who can, without emotions of pity, behold the deathbed of a penitent—that penitent a parent!—Ferdinand was not so entirely lost to humanity as to regard her unmoved, for sincere and fervent was her repentance, and acute her sufferings. She extended her hand—the clammy moisture of death was on it, and taking that of Ferdinand, she drew him towards her, and feebly embraced him.—“ Here, my child,” said she, “ is a lesson for the wisest; where is the one who may not gain instruction from a scene like this? whose is the bosom that it may not fill with awe?—Listen to me with attention, and let the last words of your dying mother be indelibly impressed on your memory for the remainder of your life. I am now quitting for ever  
this

this sinful world—bidding farewell to all its pomps and vanities, those baneful seducers that first misled me—a world where, like yourself, my son, I had my foibles and my vices flattered, cherished, and indulged, instead of being combatted, until they fastened upon my heart, and became almost the very essence of my existence; I revelled in a round of luxury and delight, at the end of each day looking forward for the next, only that it might bring me new pleasures, new temptations: all these, alas! it brought; I grew enamoured of this world—it was the only heaven of my wishes, and I thought not of another. But soon or late, I trust, repentance comes to all—to me it comes in the solemn hour of dissolution, blotting out my sins, and divesting death of its terrors. I have made my peace above—I have entreated the pardon of my God, and I can die happy. Oh, Ferdinand! think of this—think of thy mother's deathbed; repent thou likewise,  
and

and may thy last moments be as tranquil as mine!" This was the last effort of expiring nature—she sank back on her pillow, and almost in the next instant ceased to live.

Ferdinand was visibly much affected—his heart, hitherto so obdurate, was softened by remorse, and he promised the weeping Jacintha (his nurse, and the signora's only domestic and friend during her illness), that the rest of his life should, by his amendment, atone for the errors and the irregularities of that which was past—a promise in which he was at the time sincere.

The proud count Velasco was now placed in very different circumstances—he had not even money sufficient for the interment of his unfortunate mother, and the kind-hearted Jacintha not only gave him all the assistance in her power to accomplish this, but drew from her little store

store to supply his necessities; these indeed were numerous and urgent, inso-much that, beholding him thus reduced, his affectionate nurse carried her generosity still farther, and insisted on his partaking of the comforts of her homely dwelling, and residing with her altogether.

Such an offer was too consonant with his own wishes to be rejected; he divested himself of the gaudy exterior of rank which he could no longer keep up, and leaving off the title of count, under the plain name of Ferdinand Velasco he took up his abode with her, professing what he then really felt, a deep sense of her kindness. Beyond the reach of former temptations, in this humble seclusion he gave himself up for some time alternately to study and to the management of Jacintha's little garden, and other domestic concerns; but the weeds that are not plucked by the root from the soil they infest,

infest, but merely severed by the stem, ever regenerate with redoubled vigour and venom; so also the evil propensities of the human heart, if not eradicated, and that heart strictly disciplined, are ever sure to baffle each weak attempt to nip them in the growth.

The temper of the young recluse was by no means fitted for a life of solitude, nor had it vanquished his naturally-buoyant spirits; he again sighed for the company of his old associates, again sighed to participate in their diversions. Jacintha was no longer an object of his gratitude—he no longer thanked her with his accustomed sincerity for the kindnesses she daily heaped upon him—his deportment to her was sullen and morose—he looked on her as a being so vastly inferior to him, that his subsisting on her bounty amply repaid the obligation by the honour he conferred in doing so; all his mother's exhortations were forgotten, and he became  
every

every day more and more discontented with his lot.

Jacintha noticed this, and well she knew what to attribute it to; but, aware how dreary were his prospects, and hoping still that time and his own reflections would reconcile him to the privations his misconduct had occasioned, she forbore to comment on it, or even to reprove him for the contemptuous treatment she daily experienced from him. But the masterpiece of his ingratitude was yet to come. At Jacintha's request he repaired to Florence, to receive a considerable sum of money that was due to her there, having made up his mind as to the purpose he should apply it to. In a fatal hour the whole sum was paid into his hands—two hundred ducats was the amount; he viewed it with rapacious delight—it was the first time, for nearly a year, that so much money was in his possession, and, now that he had it, he determined to make  
the

the most of it. Instead of returning home, it was his intention to spend the night at his former place of rendezvous, the gaming-table, whither he presently bent his steps. As he walked slowly along a dark and unfrequented street that led to it, he was accosted by a voice familiar to him, and looking round, he instantly recognized the signor Maratti—a character with whom he had some months before become acquainted, at the very place to which he was now going. With all the unceremonious freedom of an old friend, Maratti took his arm and accompanied him, for his destination was the same.

There was a mystery about this man which none could penetrate; and Ferdinand was wholly ignorant who he was, how he lived, or where he had a home. The gambling-house seemed to be his principal resort in Florence: like the owl, he sallied forth at night, to mingle in its noisy revels, and through the day his  
haunts

haunts were obscure and unsearchable. A few, with whom he appeared to be most intimate at this general rendezvous, had once or twice ventured to question him on the subject; but the displeasure he evinced at such questions completely awed them from a repetition of them. All inquiries about him seemed as if baffled by some superior and invisible power, and they were at length abandoned as fruitless. But notwithstanding these suspicious circumstances, he was there the life of the society, and found none scrupulous or virtuous enough to shrink from the acquaintance of a being who was either afraid or ashamed to declare who he was. His mind was enriched by a knowledge of almost every science that man is capable of attaining, and his extensive information rendered him a lively and intelligent companion. His gaiety appeared spontaneous and unforced—his wit, brilliant and inexhaustible—his penetration, skilful and profound—he read, with one deep glance,

glance, every passion, every movement of the heart; but *his* inward heart was hidden from all—*his* thoughts none could dive into. His manners were of that specious and conciliating cast that fascinated all—and amongst his most devoted admirers, the infatuated Velasco ranked one of the first—and he felt not a little flattered on perceiving that this sentiment of admiration was reciprocal.

From their first meeting, the signor had always regarded him with peculiar attention. In Ferdinand's deportment there was certainly something noble and engaging; and to this was Maratti's partiality to him attributed by the rest. The signor, however, seemed to think it his privilege to ask those questions of others, which he refused to answer of himself.

On the way he interrogated Ferdinand as to his present pursuits, and the manner in which he had passed his time since they  
saw

saw each other before. These inquiries were suggested, apparently, more by friendship than mere curiosity, and they were ingenuously replied to. Velasco told him of his mother's death, and the humble and dependent state to which his own extravagance had subsequently reduced him—that he now lived at a short distance from Florence, in the cottage of his nurse, who, possessing a little money, was enabled to support him without injury to herself; and crowned his indiscretion, by letting him know what use he was about to make of the ducats he had just received in her name.

In the most imposing tone of kindness, Maratti expressed his regret and surprise that one so young, and so highly gifted by nature, should have doomed himself to a life of obscurity—buried in a lonely cottage, with his old nurse—to solitude that befitted but a hermit, or misanthrope—and occupations ignoble and unmanly.

—“ You

—“ You were not born to live unknown, my friend,” said he : “ your very personal endowments alone entitle you to mingle in the society of the world. Nature has done much for you—she has given you a prepossessing face, a figure noble and commanding, a mind towering and lofty—far, far superior to the generality of men : and for *what*, forsooth, has she given you all these?—surely not merely to exhibit them to a jabbering old woman—not to employ your splendid talents on pursuits frivolous, and almost menial—not to spend your days amongst woods and purling streams.—No, Ferdinand ! she has gifted you thus that you may be a hero ! that you may earn renown and honours immortal—that you may do such deeds as magnanimity alone can perform—that you may live and die a hero ! and deserve those laurels which, waving around your grave, shall tell the world in after days, ‘ Here lies Velasco ! ’ ”

This was a strain of encomium that  
Ferdinand

Ferdinand was unaccustomed to—vanity and heroism already inflated his bosom; yet there was something in Maratti's manner that almost alarmed while it flattered him.—“But how, signor,” asked he, smiling at his enthusiasm, “how are all these great intentions of nature to be accomplished?—by what means am I to become the hero, and earn the laurels you speak of?”

“How!” repeated Maratti; “easily enough: there are many ways of obtaining fame, count; but we will talk farther on this subject to-morrow.—Now for the chance of a few pistoles.”

They entered the room together, and were welcomed, after their long absence, by expressions of cordiality and friendship on all sides. The games, however, suffered only a momentary interruption—all was again a scene of deafening clamour, bustle, and confusion; even the din of rattling dice was drowned in the loud  
incongruity

incongruity of contending voices—the exulting shouts of the winners at one moment thundered upon the air; and in the next, the whole place was converted into a hell, by the horrible rage and vociferations of the losers.

Ferdinand was but an indifferent player, which all around him were aware of, especially Maratti, who eagerly watched him.

A young cavalier, flushed with wine, and displaying a profusion of gold, presently entered, and staking a hundred and fifty ducats, challenged any one to lay down a similar sum. This appeared fair game for Velasco, who had determined to run every risk, and instantly rushing forward, he flung down two hundred, desiring the other to produce fifty more, which was accordingly done.

The cavalier threw with apparent indifference ;

ference; and in a moment bets were doubled in favour of Ferdinand, who, in a transport of joy almost convulsive, grasped the dice-box, and whirled out its contents.—“Victory, victory! they are mine, by Heaven!” exclaimed he, with a triumphant laugh, as he snatched up the glittering prize.

“We will double it, Velasco,” said his disappointed adversary, putting down four hundred ducats, which was readily agreed to.

They threw again, and Ferdinand lost. A tremendous imprecation burst from him—not a single ducat now remained in his possession! Almost frantic at his loss, he was hurrying away, when, seizing his arm, Maratti withheld him—“Eh, Velasco!” said he, laughing sportively, as he forced him back, “would *you* act the baby thus, and fly off half-crying, at having lost a few paltry ducats. Come, come, my boy, cheer up, and prepare to play something like

like a manly game—here is a loan of four hundred for you, which will get you your own back again in the twinkling of an eye; or, if you lose, why, confound it, let the loss be mine.”

Without hesitating to consider what might be the motives of such extraordinary generosity, or how it was to be repaid, Ferdinand instantly took the proffered sum, and scarcely knowing what he did, dashed it on the table.—“Down with four hundred, if you are a man!” he passionately exclaimed, addressing the cavalier, who, with a haughty grin of satisfaction at his own success, complied.

Again and again fortune befriended Velasco, until, with a loud and harrowing curse, his antagonist declared he had lost five thousand ducats, and would play no more.

Ferdinand's heart beat with violent emotions of rapture, as he heard the vast  
F 2 amount

amount of his luck, and saw his opponent quit the table completely stripped. In this wild tumult of joy he forgot his debt to Maratti, who, without alluding to it, now stepped forward, demanding if he would venture again for one thousand.—He paused in momentary fear and irresolution—how terrible, should he lose! but then the idea of winning was Heaven itself—he would in that case have six thousand two hundred ducats—the impulse was irresistible; and inwardly ejaculating a prayer for success, of which he had not a doubt, he exultingly counted out the sum.

Every passion of his soul might be read in his countenance, as with one great sweep he cleared the board; and this was a subject of wonder to the by-standers, as the signor Maratti was known to be a first-rate player, and almost invariably a winner.

Six

Six thousand two hundred were now staked by each—doubled—and all fell to Ferdinand, whose ecstasy broke out in several wild and incoherent expressions.

“Velasco, you are a lucky fellow to-night,” observed one of the lookers-on.

“Psha! a mere bagatelle,” said Maratti—“mere children’s play: come now, Velasco, we will play like men, and set others an example. Let me see, there are just forty-nine thousand six hundred ducats between us—not one more or less—it is a trifle to be sure, compared to what we *have* played for ere now; but let us have a trial for it.”

“By the mass! this night will make your fortune,” was the general buz in the ears of the half-hoping, half-fearing Ferdinand: “Maratti is no match for you; you will pluck his wings while there is a feather in them.”

Velasco thought it a dreadful and im-  
F 3 prudent

prudent hazard, notwithstanding all their flattering anticipations; but should he refuse, he would be scoffed at, and perhaps expelled! Encouraged by their loudly-expressed hopes, and the probability of his winning, he could no longer hesitate—more than forty-nine thousand ducats sparkled on the board! What a sight for the rapacious eye of a gamester! Ferdinand's eyes seemed ready to devour the golden treasure—they were fastened on it as if it was the god of his adoration; his life, his soul, his all on earth and heaven, seemed to depend upon one single throw—one eventful cast of the dice; on the deed of a moment hung his fate—that moment came—with dreadful impatience he threw the dice, and lost!

Instantaneously his colour changed to the livid hue of death.—“Powers infernal all is gone, and I am undone!” he frantically screamed, and snatching a stiletto from beneath his mantle, he plunged it in his  
side,

side, and fell to the ground in strong convulsions.

Just then a summons, evidently preconcerted, called Maratti away, and amidst the confusion that ensued, he triumphantly bore off his valuable booty.

Meantime a surgeon had been sent for, to examine Ferdinand's wound, which was found to be only superficial, the weapon having met some opposition from a belt round his waist, and was easily closed by the application of proper dressing and bandages. It had, however, bled profusely, and for many hours he continued relapsing from one fainting fit into another, occasioned less by consequent debility than his yet-unsubdued rage. He raved incessantly on his loss, during his short intervals of animation, vowing the direst vengeance on Maratti, and accusing those around him of having been all colleagueed to ruin him. With much difficulty his

senses were restored to a state of composure, and at his own desire a temporary lodging was procured for him in the neighbourhood, whither he was carefully conveyed; and the surgeon having prevailed on him to take a powerful opiate, he soon sunk into a profound sleep, which lasted until late on the following day.

On awakening from this transient oblivion, a thousand terrible thoughts assailed him: he had never been sunk so deep in guilt before, nor ever had his situation been so utterly hopeless—without friends! without a home!—for after his villainy he dared not think of returning to Jacintha, and he had nothing to expect from Maratti—nay, he was already indebted to him four hundred ducats; and surely the best he had to hope was, that he would not demand the payment of them, for to pay such a debt was impossible: but how little did he know of Maratti!—how greatly did he deceive himself by such a hope!

hope! Deeply, bitterly, he cursed the hand that had reduced him to beggary; and long he prayed that he might never behold that mysterious and awful being again—a wish that seemed likely to be gratified, as he had neither seen nor heard any thing of him since his sudden disappearance on the preceding night, laden with his ill-gotten gold.

Thus did he pass this day of horror—the horror of conscious guilt. Early on the next he was able to quit his bed, and shortly afterwards Maratti appeared before him. He blamed him for the rash act he had committed, but congratulated him on his recovery, saying he should have come to see him sooner, but had been prevented by unavoidable business.

The sight of him was now hateful to Ferdinand, who trembled with the apprehension of hearing his debt mentioned,

F 5

and

and in part anticipated what he was about to say.

“ You have been a loser to a great extent, I presume,” observed the signor.

“ I have indeed,” replied the terrified Velasco: “ I have turned the two hundred ducats to bad account.”

“ And the *four* hundred *I* lent you to no better,” said the other, emphatically.

Ferdinand could put no favourable construction on this.—“ Would to Heaven you had *not* lent them to me !” said he.

“ It is certainly unfortunate, count, especially as I am at present in need of money, and a large sum too: pressing exigencies compel me to mention this—of course, signor, you understand me—money must be had—and you will oblige me by procuring for me the amount of your debt against this time to-morrow.”

Horror-struck at the demand, after the money had been voluntarily tendered to him,

him, without any condition of payment—a demand too which he was so totally unable to answer, Ferdinand looked incredulously at him for a moment, but his stern aspect forbade a doubt.—“ Good God !” he wildly cried, “ in what way am I to procure it for you—what would you have me do ?”

“ Do ! why cajole your indulgent old nurse for it, to be sure—you have not scrupled to *borrow* two hundred ducats of her money already, and surely the kind, good-hearted soul will not refuse to accommodate you with a few hundreds more.”

“ Absurd ! monstrous ! you know well, signor, that I dare not make such an application—you do but banter with me.”

“ Count Velasco, you mistake me,” said Maratti, with a severe frown ; “ I am in no bantering humour—your reply is ridiculous. Recollect that this business is of a serious nature, and admits of no trifling : I repeat that I am urged by  
F 6 necessity,

necessity, and the money I *must* have by to-morrow morning, get it how you will."

Any means of obtaining it Ferdinand would have seized, but there were none.—“Can you, signor, thus cruelly insist on an impossibility? know you not that it is entirely out of my power to pay you at present?—will you not pity me?” continued he, falling on his knees at the feet of this deep-designing and inexorable villain—so abject does a consciousness of guilt render us—“will you not compassionate me for the consequences I have suffered? I cannot, indeed I cannot, refund the sum at present, but——”

“Pity you!” reiterated Maratti, turning from him with a contemptuous smile; “will *pity* restore my money, which you sacrificed to your demoniac passions at the gaming-table?—will *pity*, forsooth! put four hundred ducats in my pocket, or will *pity* save you from my just revenge? Count Velasco, do you take me for a fool?—~~I~~ *pity* you indeed, but what of *that*?—  
think

think you that so childish a sentiment will prevent me from asserting my right, or enforcing the money you have robbed me of?—think you that I *fear* to do so? No, no—well might you then laugh at me, and *pity me* as a fool in earnest. But this is mere drivelling—I am not one who will be sported with. Mark me, now! yonder sun reaches not its meridian tomorrow, ere every ducat of it shall be returned to me, or tremble at the storm of vengeance I will hurl upon your head.”

“What vengeance?” cried the shuddering Ferdinand—“Say, signor Maratti, what is it you would do?”

“Deliver you into the hands of justice—ay, gasp and stare if you will, until you turn to a statue! To justice, I repeat—you shall dearly pay for *borrowing* your nurse’s property without her permission, and I need not tell *you* how they punish rogues in Florence.”

“Wretch!” vociferated Ferdinand,  
starting

starting indignantly from his kneeling posture, no longer able to contain himself, and grasping the arm that Maratti extended to wave him off, "dare you thus mock the miseries you yourself have caused—condemn the vices yourself have led me into? Oh, no, it surely cannot be—this indeed is burlesquing hypocrisy—human nature cannot possibly be so base! you would not thus requite my former friendship and favours to you?"

"Poor worthless insect! is it *you* who dares talk to me in this presumptuous strain?—Favours! beware, stripling, of forgetting yourself too far. I say, again, my money I *will* have; or by this hand that lent it to you, I will deliver you to death!"

"Then begone, ingrate! vilest of hypocrites! and to your worst I dare you!" exclaimed Velasco, his heart torn with rage, and his eyes flashing indignation and horror—"Begone! or I shall forget myself—

myself—forget every thing, until the sight of my dagger, plunged to the hilt in your blood, shall recall me!”

“Count,” said the signor, coolly, “you have now sealed the fiat of your doom—I have a remedy, and I go to employ it—I will hear no more of your canting.”

The idea of a prison and a public execution almost froze Velasco’s blood.—

“Stay, stay, signor, hear me for an instant, I conjure you—say, is there *no* alternative?—if *not*, in mercy take this poniard, and let your heaviest blow sink it deep in my heart: I would bless the hand that would strike me dead at once, rather than consign me to such a fate as that!”

“Alas, poor whining youth! I would not quell this fit of heroism by any suggestion of mine—your haughty soul would spurn an alternative.—Farewell!”

“Great God, pity me!—any thing, any thing, signor, will I agree to; but, oh, do not blast my honour in this world!”

“Your honour!” reechoed Maratti,  
laughing

laughing aloud; "a gamester's *honour*!—well, be it so—there is but one thing, and *that* compassion alone suggests—all rests on a moment, on your answer to me—on the single monosyllable, yes, or no, depends the decision—will you take an oath of secrecy?"

Ferdinand shuddered.—"I will," he at length articulated.

"Swear to me then," pursued Maratti, "by your soul's immortality, you will never disclose what I shall impart, or what I shall require of you." Almost overcome with horror, Velasco took the oath.

"Do you further promise," asked Maratti, "to do whatever I shall demand of you?"

"Most solemnly I do," was the almost inaudible reply.

"Enough, count; I am satisfied, and you are safe." With stern dignity he reseated himself, desiring Velasco to do the same.—"You have sworn secrecy and obedience, count Velasco," said he, "and  
you

you shall now know me—I will now tell you who and what I am, and whence I came.—My name is Gonsalvo Maratti, and I am a bandit chief: for a few years my brave men and I found a refuge in this country; in one of the largest forests of Tuscany we discovered a rude cavern, which being on the borders of the Mediterranean, had formerly served as a retreat for a gang of African pirates, who had for a long time carried on their depredations in perfect security from justice—there we also succeeded for a while in eluding pursuit. At length an individual in this city, who was high in power, got some intelligence of our abode, and prepared himself with a host of armed men to seize upon us, which luckily reaching my ears in time, compelled us to fly at half an hour's notice, in order to save our lives. Part of our band were for awaiting the attack, and putting them all to the sword; but I represented to them that the cavern, having once become known, was

was

was no longer a place of safety for us; and my advice being the more prudent, we at once took our departure, and emigrated to Poland. The extensive woods with which that country abounds, afforded every facility we could desire of securely following the profession by which we lived. Chance or fate very soon favoured us altogether—in the interior of one of the largest forests in the kingdom, and one of the gloomiest and most thickly planted, stood an ancient castle, falling rapidly to decay, but on every side strongly bulwarked by nature and art. It had been built by a Polish nobleman in one of the civil wars, for the safety of himself and his family; and truly, unless he could have erected a retreat beneath the ocean itself, he could not have more effectually baffled the hand of war and rapine. The family after a while became extinct; from some unknown cause the place was entirely deserted; and not long afterwards a few straggling marauders took possession of

of it, and by their exertions rendered it again habitable. In our search we discovered it, and soon came on friendly terms with its inmates, who, perceiving that we were of the same description as themselves, proposed that we should join them, and become one united band, of which I was to be the leader. Such an offer was exactly what we wished for. It was unanimously agreed to, and the next day the whole troop was marshalled in the castle; ever since which time I have held the distinguished office of their chief.

“ Many are the exploits we have there performed—many are the deeds of valour and of death that forest has witnessed; nay, so formidable did our arms render it, that its name terrified the whole surrounding country. We ever eluded pursuit; and justice, wearied with fruitless efforts to take us, at length left us in quiet, undisputed possession of it.

“ Having

“ Having at intervals some relaxation from my duties, I occasionally took a journey into other countries, assuming, for safety, different names. Amongst many cities which I visited, Florence attracted me most ; and amongst my occupations, the gaming-table : there, signor, I first beheld you, and struck with your personal dignity and courage, I immediately determined to enlist you under my banners, if possible : to that end, I set myself to ascertain who you were—with one deep and unerring glance I read your heart, and found you well suited to my purpose ; that purpose became the exclusive object of my exertions, and I have at length accomplished it ; for never yet has any enterprise, however arduous, in my hands failed.”

His meaning was too plain to be misunderstood, and Ferdinand saw himself completely ensnared—“ You would have me join your troop, then, and become a bandit ?” said he.

“ I would,

“ I would, signor,” replied Maratti, resolutely : “ you are now my man—your allegiance and services now are *mine*—we want one to make up our usual number, and you are just the man that will suit us.”

“ And would you indeed compel me to a life so——”

“ Compel you!” interrupted the other, passionately : “ talk not to me in this strain. Hell and furies! think you, sir, that I gave you four hundred ducats for *nothing*?—think you that I would tamely submit to be swindled—robbed? I tell you coolly, signor Velasco, I have bought you—mine you are, and ever shall be—and, by Heaven! I *will* compel you to your duty, if obstinacy on your part renders compulsion necessary.”

“ I see I am yours, wholly yours,” said Ferdinand, fearful that he might yet betray him to justice.

This was uttered in a tone of submission that somewhat appeased the chief, who, taking

taking his hand, resumed—"Forgive me, my friend, for speaking thus harshly; it is not natural to me, though I am sometimes too easily provoked: compulsion I am sure is needless, so we will now look at the bright side of the picture. You will have no cause to regret this business, or quarrel with a bandit's life; for from me and from the rest you will ever meet with brotherly kindness and affection: nay, our profession holds out every inducement to *you* in particular. Contemplate for a moment your present situation—nothing can be more desperate; in Florence you have no home whatever; and to return to the cottage of the woman whose property you have converted to a dishonest use, would be the act of a madman, unless indeed you were tired of this world, and wished to run the shortest road to the next, which that would be. Recollect, Velasco, the ignominious station you lately stooped to fill. Ere now I have told you that you were born for greater

greater things—do you not *feel* that you were?—full of life, health, and vigour, do you not instinctively know this?—Does not nature spur you on to the deeds of bravery and valour you were born for? Assuredly it does; and with us you will have a wide field for the display of your prowess: ours, signor, is a life of independence, happiness, and festivity—free and unbridled, the laws of honour amongst ourselves are the only laws we recognize—all others we spurn—no puny power holds us in subjection—no preposterous formalities shackle our inclinations—we are free—free as the air around us—wealth and the world's luxuries are at our command—at the termination of one day we dream but of the pleasures that are to come on the next. This, Velasco, is real happiness—what more can mortal wish for, or what more can mortal have?”

Ferdinand was himself an enthusiast; and so glowing a description could not fail to

to make a strong impression on him : his warm imagination feasted on the prospect of a life of independence—unfettered, uncontrolled ; and it required but little more of Maratti's eloquence to gain his entire acquiescence.

But this was not all he required of his dupe, who was hurried too far to be able to retract.—“ One thing more must be done,” said he, “ and then we bid farewell to Tuscany : we are in want of somebody to manage our household affairs at the castle ; it is a situation easy and comfortable, and one precisely suited to the condition and the years of Jacintha, your nurse.”

“ You surely cannot be serious, signor ! As reasonably might you expect the sun to appear to your call at the hour of midnight, as hope that Jacintha would ever comply with such a wish.”

“ Ay, ay,” said the chief, with a facetious grin ; “ but I have more ways than  
one

one of obtaining what I wish for—I generally find *force* a sovereign remedy when others fail.”

“ Force !” reiterated Velasco, almost shocked at the thought.

“ Ay, *force* !—I believe I said the word plainly enough—force !—if that is not intelligible to you, I will tell you in other words what I mean : that you and I shall go to-night, seize her and carry her off, bag and baggage, money and jewels—now do you comprehend me ?”

The idea of such an act of horrible and lawless violence was yet appalling to Velasco ; but he was so entirely in the bandit's power now, that, in spite of all the ‘ compunctious visitings of nature,’ he could not choose but comply. As a more powerful inducement, Maratti represented to him the absolute necessity of such a measure, to put an end at once to the danger he would otherwise be always liable to, of being apprehended for the fraud

he had committed, and brought to condign punishment; for it did not appear at all likely that love, or partiality, would so far counterbalance her resentment at the discovery of it, as to prevent her from making it public, and taking proper steps to bring him to justice. Convinced of this, the infatuated Ferdinand assented to his plan; and every thing being arranged for it, they sallied forth on a ramble through the city, to pass away the intervening hours. During the day Maratti quitted him not for a moment; artful and treacherous himself, he suspected others of being equally so, and determined not to lose sight of him, or leave it in his power to betray him.

They returned not until the dusk of the evening, and Maratti having furnished him with money to discharge the lodging, they set out for the cottage of Jacintha, to execute the iniquitous project of carrying her off. Resistance and entreaties were

were alike unavailing to the unhappy woman; in vain she reminded Ferdinand of his obligations to her—in vain did she weep and implore, from whose breast he had drawn his first nourishment. Maratti's doctrines now appeared to have blunted all humanity in him; and while the latter plundered the cottage of the money, and every portable article it contained, Ferdinand unfeelingly dragged her out, and placing her in a sort of carriage they had hired for the purpose, he seated himself beside her. Maratti presently afterwards jumping in, they drove off, and the following morning beheld them, far beyond the Italian territories.

CHAPTER V.  

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Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort,  
As if he mocked himself, and scorned his spirit,  
That could be moved to smile at any thing.

SHAKESPEARE.

A LONG familiarity with vice had at length totally seared Velasco's heart against every inroad of virtue; remorseless and un pitying, he beheld Jacintha's tears—unmoved, heard her bitter reproaches—reproaches which he well deserved; without a blush he communicated to her the whole transaction at the gaming-table, telling her, to add to the miseries of her situation, that they were entirely the consequences of his villainy. Of this it was needless to inform her, for she well knew what he was capable of, and seeing that he

he was hardened against all remonstrance, she at length silently resigned herself to her inevitable fate, ignorant yet what it might be, for they had not even told her whither they were conveying her.

Their former confidence was fully restored between Maratti and Velasco on the journey, which they found as pleasant as expeditious travelling and good living could render it.

In a few days they reached the forest, whose frightful gloom was well calculated to excite the superstitious fears of Jacintha, whom they now informed of the purpose for which they had brought her, and the office she was destined to fill.

This was a lot comparatively happy to what she had dreaded; she had, ere their arrival, given herself up for lost, and prepared for death, for from the conversation, she was at no loss to know what the

signor Maratti was; and having her life spared almost reconciled her to the conviction, that she must spend it in the service of a set of outlawed banditti, who, if ever they came to punishment, would probably involve her in their fate.

In the whole gang there was something terrific and horrible to her; the savage manners and features of some, and the coarse and brutal jests of others, were equally formidable to her, and her terrors soon made her an object of malignant derision to all of them—terrors which met nothing that could diminish them; on the contrary, every part of this extensive old ruin, which she had occasion to venture into, presented something to augment them: beyond the inhabited part of the castle nothing could induce her to go, notwithstanding her curiosity to explore the long picture galleries and dark chambers, where dwelt such solemn silence, mystery, and death.

Her

Her life there seldom afforded her an hour's tranquillity; when the banditti were out on their lawless excursions, she was left completely alone in those late haunts of dissipation and guilt, the mementoes of which the courage of the most dauntless might have shrunk from beholding; and when they were at home, she was exposed to horrors still more appalling—their language and their deeds.

The return of their chief with Velasco was greeted with carousals of every description; they had apparently been in expectation of the latter, from which circumstance it was obvious that Maratti had long had in view this acquisition to their strength and formidable numbers.

The exercise of travelling had opened Ferdinand's wound afresh, and soon after his arrival at the castle, an unrestrained indulgence in wine and feasting threw him into a serious fit of illness, which ex-

cited apprehensions of its terminating fatally.

Jacintha, now more strongly than ever, evinced the real goodness of her heart, in her unwearied attention to her patient; with all the care and assiduity of a fond mother, she watched over him through the whole progress of his disorder, and at the expiration of a week, she thought herself amply rewarded by his recovery.

The ungrateful Velasco was of the same opinion, and offered her no other; when he was able to quit his bed, he forgot all her kindnesses, and treated her in the same unfeeling manner that the others did.

Ferdinand's present life was exactly congenial to his taste and his capacity; scenes of profane and boisterous revelry at home, and rapine and bloodshed abroad, marked every alternate day, and in such scenes he was always a distinguished performer;

former; in deeds of personal courage, however desperate, his heart panted for celebrity, for his arm was strong and his spirit dauntless, and that celebrity he was not long in obtaining: in all their undertakings he signalized himself by his extraordinary powers; in their attacks he was ever the first to advance, and the last to retreat, and generally bore off the valuable booty in complete triumph; rising daily in the estimation of his dreadful and sanguinary associates, he was soon at the pinnacle of all that desperation and wickedness in mortal can arrive at; the bravest amongst them, he was also the object of their most enthusiastic praises and admiration; to his highest advancement there was but one step remaining. Now then was he the hero he had been designed for—this was the renown Maratti had foretold—these praises were the laurels with which he was to be crowned—these murderous achievements the ones that were to render his

G. 5.

name

name immortal—higher than this ambition scarce could soar.

Jealous of his superiority, Maratti at length perceiving himself thus eclipsed, conceived an implacable enmity towards him, which grew to such a height in the venom of his black heart, that but for the dread of suspicion and detection from the band, he would, by poison or the dagger, have cut off the one he had himself seduced thither; but he foresaw not how soon they were to part for ever.

A party of them, headed by the signor, having one day attacked some wealthy travellers, Maratti, stimulated by maddening envy towards Velasco, and eager for a speedy victory, rushed on his opponents precipitately and without discretion; impetuosity defeated the aim of his random blows, the assaulted party became the victors, and he fell and expired covered with wounds.

Warned

Warned by his fate, and seeing that they would otherwise be inevitably overpowered, the "better part of valour" seemed the wiser; and the rest, whom Velasco had not this day accompanied to rouse them to fresh exertions, made a precipitate retreat into the depths of the forest, just time enough to evade the pursuit of an armed force that had rushed after them: from the most imminent danger of being taken, they at length completely effected their escape, but in doing so they were obliged to leave behind them the body of their unfortunate chief, as any attempt to gain possession of it would have been fatal to them. On the succeeding day it was gone, and what became of it they never afterwards learned.

Piqued at their partiality to Velasco, Maratti had lately betrayed so much ill humour as to render himself obnoxious to several of the gang, who would willingly have removed him, and elected Ferdinand

in his place; that wish, however, they had not until now ventured to express; but the opportunity they had so long desired was arrived, and they lost no time ere they took advantage of it.

As soon as it was announced to them all that Maratti was no more, their choice was unanimously fixed upon Velasco—a choice which he had for some time secretly aspired to. Being all assembled in the hall, the oaths of fidelity were mutually taken, and Ferdinand was duly appointed to be their chief. Maratti had been a man of undoubted bravery, but none regretted his death, and he was very soon forgotten altogether.

Under the command of their new leader, their exploits became daily more bloody, and their attacks more numerous, more successful, and at a greater distance from the castle; they seemed indeed not only to set justice totally at defiance, but to  
overawe

overawe it from further attempts upon them; insomuch that Velasco at length feared not to ride through parts of the neighbourhood in the open day, and unaccompanied.

In one of those excursions he met the companion of his youth, Arnold, his foster-brother; he was still in the service of prince Leopold, who had returned from Germany to his father's court, and they recognized each other with mutual satisfaction; Arnold, because he was really attached to Ferdinand, and the latter, because it afforded him an opportunity of making some communications to Leopold, whom he had not seen for many months.

The passion for gaming was still a ruling one with Ferdinand, who made it his principal domestic amusement; he had at various times lost considerable sums of money amongst the gang, by which his *debts of honour* accumulated to such a height,

height, that even the fruits of his daily expeditions abroad kept not pace with them. The one who recoiled not from guilt of the most atrocious nature, dreaded the odium that he should incur from leaving such debts as these unpaid; and how to avoid it he knew not, until it occurred to him that Leopold, who had professed the warmest friendship for him, and on whom he thought consanguinity gave him a claim, would generously assist him, from the ample fortune he possessed; he was no stranger to the vices or the weaknesses of the duke's character, and he fancied, if friendship should not, that the latter would lead him to do this much for one still more nearly allied to him in principle than in birth.

Taking the astonished Arnold aside, he, after some hesitation, informed him what was his present mode of life, but carefully concealed the guilty circumstances that had brought him to it.

The

The first question that suggested itself to Arnold was relative to his mother, from whom he had, of course, never heard since his arrival at Warsaw, although he had addressed several letters to Tuscany. Alarmed at not having received an answer to any of them, he had obtained the duke's permission to visit his native country, for the purpose of ascertaining whether this beloved parent was still in existence; for, with all his faults, he affectionately loved his mother, who indeed had well deserved that affection, and was on the eve of departure thither, when he thus unexpectedly encountered Velasco.

Rejoiced at an opportunity of hearing something of her, he demanded of the chief, how, and in what circumstances, he had left her, and whether she yet lived in her usual cottage near Florence? Ferdinand was vexed at his interrogatories, for they were such as he durst not answer with truth. He who would undauntedly  
have

have faced a legion of armed men, now shrunk from the idea of the furious glance of a son, on hearing of the cruelty and outrage that had been practised towards his mother; even from this lowly-born peasant, the proud Velasco feared the power that ever nerves the arm in a just cause, and he did not venture to brave it.

A wish to explain to him at once the business for which he had detained him, afforded him a plea for answering those questions evasively.—“I saw your mother not long since,” said he; “she was then living and well: but we will talk of her some other time—I have now a few important inquiries to make of you; and first tell me, has the prince, your master, lately mentioned my name, or anywhere addressed a letter to me? My quitting Tuscany necessarily interrupted our correspondence, though I have twice visited that country since, and each time found some intelligence from him.”

“Frequently,

“ Frequently, count, he has spoken of you : surprised at receiving no reply to his numerous letters, since our quitting Germany he has given up writing to you, thinking you had gone abroad, or were perhaps no more ; his attention is now principally engrossed by the lingering illness of the king, his father, whose complaint, a consumption, it is feared, will very shortly terminate his reign ; the hopes of the nation are centered in the prince royal, the amiable Augustus, who must, of course, soon ascend the throne, and from whom much is expected. Prince Leopold has also experienced the royal favour in being created duke of Silesia, and appointed commander of the guards—an office attended with equal dignity and emolument: the king too has lately——”

“ A truce with the king !” interrupted the impatient Ferdinand ; “ Leopold, duke of Silesia, you say, possesses an ample fortune ?”

“ Ay, count Velasco, a fortune well suited

suited to a prince, and one who knows how to spend it generously.”

“ He is liberal in the disposal of it then ?”

“ Never was man more so—I am fed, clothed, and paid sumptuously—my trifling services are well rewarded.”

This promised fair to the wily chief, who smilingly observed—“ I wish somebody would pay *me* for my services, Arnold, or that his highness had any thing to do in *my* way ; for, to speak the truth, I am just about as poor as he is rich : you say he is commander of the guards, and, in faith, if he wants one who can fire the harquebuss, or wield the sword to perfection, I am his man.”

“ Good, my lord,” replied Arnold, smiling equally, “ I could get a job, as it is, for any man whose conscience was as scarce a commodity with him as his money.”

“ Name it,” cried Ferdinand eagerly.

“ Nay, count Velasco, I was not serious,”

ous," said Arnold, his features assuming a profound gravity, and angry with himself for having even appeared to jest.—" You say, it is true, you are a bandit chief, and I little thought it would come to this with you ; but I trust you are not yet a villain."

" Psha! away with your starched morality," answered Velasco, still forcing himself to smile, " and tell me at once what you meant by this *job*, as you term it ; it must truly be a desperate one, if *I* cannot undertake it."

" It *would* be a desperate one, count, for this is the sum-total of the business ; the duke has taken a mortal hatred to a young officer named De Willenberg, and no longer ago than yesterday, he swore he would give any man ten thousand crowns who would shoot the said De Willenberg through the head."

Much less than the half of ten thousand crowns would have tempted Velasco to commit this horrible deed, but Arnold, he  
saw,

saw, had still sufficient principle to make him revolt from the thought of murder; and though he did not despair of winning him at last to his purpose, he thought it best to dissemble for the present.

In Arnold's composition, *principle* was indeed ever a flexible material; Leopold had twisted it, and made it subservient to all his ends, good and bad, and it required now but one effort to break it altogether.

“ I was no more serious than yourself, my friend,” said Velasco, trying to conciliate him, “ and am as little in need of money as the duke—let this prove it to you; nevertheless I wish to see his highness after so long a separation, and if that wish is reciprocal, tell him to meet me here, on the borders of the forest, this day week, and at the same hour, unattended. I need hardly caution *you*, Arnold, to breathe nothing of this interview to mortal

tal.

tal else; accept some slight remuneration for your trouble—farewell!”

As he said this, he put some pieces of gold into his hand, and motioning to him to be gone, he returned to the castle, to consider at his leisure by what means he could best take advantage of the generosity or the weakness of Leopold.

Arnold delivered his message to the duke, and related the whole conversation that had passed between them, not aware of the fatal impression it would make upon his highness, who had too deep a part to play, to neglect obeying Velasco's wish.

About this time De Willenberg was getting into high favour with the neighbouring nobility, and as we have before shewn, according as he rose in theirs, he sunk in that of the duke, who would really, as Arnold said, have well rewarded any one for putting an end to him, so  
powerful

powerful was the ascendancy that envy and malignity had gained over his vitiated mind; his disgrace and ruin he had in contemplation, cost what it might, or however difficult might be its accomplishment. One project at length occurred, to which he exclusively directed his thoughts, and which he believed, now that he might gain the co-operation of Velasco, bid fair to crown his devilish wishes with perfect success.

He was punctual to the appointed time and place of meeting his colleague, and found the latter equally so; at the first interview he knew it would be indiscreet, if not dangerous, to throw out a hint of the heinous object he had in view, lest it might not meet with Velasco's entire concurrence; a doubt of this nature, however, was too favourable to Ferdinand's character to last long. The duke, even by his cautious observations, easily perceived that he was not one to be startled at the mention

tion of a crime, nor awed from the perpetration of it, when urged on by any thing in guilt that could gratify his passions.

Of those passions he had long ere now discovered the master-spring; it was a spring that required to be skilfully touched, and Leopold happily possessed the knack of doing so.

Money was the god of Ferdinand's idolatry; to it he had sacrificed almost all the noblest attributes of man; his soul alone yet remained unsold, and even that was the depraved wretch ready to dispose of to the first who should propose conditions for it.

But the sacrifice of Velasco's body and soul was immaterial to Leopold, when by that he could compass his own wicked ends. Of friendship for this unfortunate dupe he was incapable; he viewed him but  
as

as the one doomed to execute his dreadful schemes, and consequences to him he totally disregarded; gratitude was alike blotted out, as superfluous and unmerited, when gold could purchase his services, however diabolical the purpose to which they were to be perverted.

At parting, he presented him with a large sum, with these memorable words—  
“Receive this, Velasco, not as a boon to your necessities, but as a pledge of my friendship for you—as a proof of what I would do for you; should *I* ever stand in need of *your* assistance, I know it will be as liberally tendered, and your friendship as unequivocally proved.”

“Doubt it not,” said Ferdinand, perfectly comprehending the drift of his liberality: those good offices were now bespoke, and he anticipated what they were to be, while he prepared for a visit to one of his old haunts in Tuscany, where he told Leopold it was probable he should  
remain

remain for three or four months, after which they promised to see each other again.

Shortly after this period, the lingering malady of the sovereign wore itself out, and he fell a victim, in the prime of life, to that most baneful of all human disorders, consumption.

The crown necessarily devolved to his elder son, Augustus, who was one of the most popular princes of the age. He entered on his reign at a time that would have been to many the most inauspicious, for his dominions throughout were in a state of warfare and distraction; invasion and hostility daily poured their numbers into his unfortunate kingdom, whose fate seemed to hang on the policy and cleverness of an individual.

Augustus had been schooled in the arts of war, and his abilities justified the san-

guine hopes of his people, in wresting once more their rights and liberties from usurpation.

The struggle was of long continuance, bravely and victoriously maintained, and at its cessation the monarch resumed the other duties of his royal station, amidst their fervent plaudits and their love.

Leopold had not yet stripped the well-earned laurels from his brow, when thorns more sharp than the dagger's point, the thorns of jealousy and envy, more venomous than the serpent's sting, began to rankle in his bosom afresh; his thoughts again were anarchy, war and bloodshed were at his heart, not against the usurpers of a nation's rights, but against an innocent individual, whom he deemed an invader on his own, De Willenberg, whose visit to Herman Castle took place about this period, and increased Leopold's rancour into actual hatred, terrible and implacable.

The

The reader is aware of the passion with which our heroine inspired this unprincipled man, who, to gratify *any* passion, left no means untried; he became a slave to the fascinations of Victoria—fascinations which had enthralled so many others, and he vowed to make her his wife, if mortal means could do so. But ere he could accomplish this, De Willenberg, he knew, must be removed; on him her affections were firmly fixed, and while he lived, he would be an insuperable barrier to his hopes. In this dilemma the promised aid of Ferdinand the bandit occurred to him, and he no sooner thought of it, than he resolved to take advantage of it, for nothing could be more suitable.

Velasco must now have returned from Tuscany, and accordingly he repaired to the edge of the forest, in search of him, on the ensuing day. Another week, however, passed over before he saw him, and then the whole tremendous plot was ar-

ranged between them ; the chief end of it was De Willenberg's death, for there was no other way of getting completely rid of him ; and neither the one shuddered at proposing, nor the other at agreeing to it ; the name of murder was a sound too familiar to the duke's ear to shock him, and the deed itself too much so to Velasco, to be viewed but with indifference.

The first part of this horribly-nefarious business was forthwith begun ; to bring about a lasting breach between Theodore and his father was to be the prelude, and this a letter which Leopold wrote to the latter in his son's name effectually did ; its consequences we have already detailed—the unhappy victim of it was disinherited ; wrapt, as he hoped, in perfect security from suspicion, the duke foresaw what would follow, and hastened to prepare his coadjutor for it, and fix with him all that was to be done.

It

It was now necessary to purchase Arnold entirely over to their plot, if ample bribery and a great man's favour could do it; and what will such things *not* do?—bribery and the favour of greatness!—we are daily witnesses how few withstand these temptations, and Arnold possessed as much frailty, and as little virtue and integrity, as many of his betters.

As he was to be an actor in the intended tragedy, it was no less necessary to introduce him to the scene of action—the bandit's castle. The requisite precautions being taken to ensure secrecy on his part, he was brought thither, and there beheld his mother—there heard the story of Ferdinand's villainy and ingratitude to the one who had nursed him, and whose friendly and hospitable roof had sheltered him from poverty.

With equal horror Jacintha heard of the conspiracy against De Willenberg, and as

she hung in tears upon her son's neck, she implored him to abjure a deed so foul, so damning—and she implored not in vain. The voice of a mother found its way to his heart amidst all its depravity—the voice of that mother, whose injuries demanded atonement, roused all his indignation against Velasco, and he vowed that the blow should revert upon him which was intended for another; he had ever been partial to De Willenberg, and even though he had gone thus far in guilt, yet it was not too late to retract.

His mother's tears had reclaimed him—had recalled humanity and religion to his bosom; Virtue, after being so long dethroned, resumed her empire there, and he promised to save the unconscious Theodore from the machinations that were in preparation against him: to do this, however, required the deepest policy, for should he now betray even the mere shadow of compunction, all would be hopeless; it

it was therefore expedient to play almost to the end the character allotted to him; his office was to remain stationed in the forest with the banditti, in order to point out their victim to them, when unlucky fate should guide him towards them.

As failure was still possible, it was suggested, that to prevent the chance of a consequent discovery, Arnold should conceal his features by a mask, and wear it till all was over. Thus prepared, Velasco and his confederates awaited the event, which Leopold's letter accelerated. De Willenberg's journey home gave the wished-for opportunity, and it was not neglected.

On the evening of the party at Zersk, when the duke had withdrawn after dinner, he wrote the warning letter, whose alarming contents deceived Theodore, and betrayed him into the hands of the banditti; this letter Arnold, with whom he

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(the

(the duke) had constant communication, got conveyed to him ; and to prevent any unfavourable surmises afterwards, Leopold regarding Theodore's death as now certain, ordered him to hire somebody in the neighbourhood of the forest, to proclaim that he had been assassinated there by the banditti.

So far Arnold had faithfully performed the duties for which he had been paid, but more important ones yet remained—to save De Willenberg's life, and avenge his mother's wrongs.

Heaven's awful judgment on the guilty Pierre, and the effects of the lightning upon himself, suspended for a while his laudable purposes ; but on recovering from the insensibility into which it had thrown him, his first inquiry was for De Willenberg, apprehensive that he might have already fallen ; he was yet in such a state of debility as to be unable to quit his bed, and  
in

in no condition to oppose their murderous plans at present, he almost despaired of being able to do so at all, and gave De Willenberg up for lost.

Jacintha was now as much interested for the latter as her son was, and quitting her patient for a while, when he had revived, she hastened to see what was passing below; as she descended, she overheard the voice of Lodovico in the hall; this was a wretch who, if it was possible to detest one of the gang more than the rest, was an object of the most deep-rooted aversion and disgust to her; he was a villain by nature, cruel, vindictive, diabolically wicked, and withal of a cowardly dastard spirit, which shrunk from every thing like danger to himself—weak and fearful even to the most absurd degree of superstition; and well may a guilty conscience ever be so—a breath which he considered supernatural would have shaken his soul from the most determined purpose, while the

awful impression remained. Jacintha being aware of this, now took advantage of it, and listening to the conversation between him and De Willenberg, it occurred to her that by alarming him, she might at the same time partly convey a warning to the latter.

A recess at one end of the hall contained a door of painted canvas, through which every sound was swelled into the most dismal echo; stationing herself there, she could distinguish all that was said within, and hers was the voice that had so appalled them when speaking of the bed in the turret, the bed that was to have been fatal to Theodore.

As she entered the hall, she discovered that the work of death was commencing; Lodovico at that moment held to De Willenberg's lips a cup of wine, which contained a powerful narcotic; he was to be thus rendered insensible, incapable of  
resistance,

resistance, borne to the turret, and murdered.

With extraordinary promptitude and presence of mind she rushed forward, for she was well acquainted with all their hellish schemes; it seemed as if Heaven had directed her thither to baffle that one, and by an apparent accident she effectually did so.

Having taken the first step towards his preservation, she returned to Arnold's apartment, considering, as she slowly bent her steps thither, what else could be done to save him, for he had now, by order of Velasco, been conducted to the turret.

Ere she reached it, her attention was arrested by a loud and furious quarrel in the room where the banditti were carousing; the most horrible oaths and execrations every moment burst from the outrageous opponents, whose voices she recognized as

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those

those of Velasco and Lodovico; but what the subject of their dispute was, she could not ascertain; the storm grew more and more frightful and boisterous, till, with a dreadful curse, Lodovico dashed open the door, and deadly pale with passion, flew down a staircase at one end of the gallery in which Jacintha stood, vowing vengeance as he precipitately rushed along.

Terrified, she entered Arnold's chamber, and told him what she had seen and heard. Things now were desperate; Theodore was enclosed in the very room where they knew no assistance, by common means, could possibly reach him. One terrible alternative alone remained, and even that might fail; but terrible as it was, it must be resorted to, as the sole chance of saving him; it was to set fire to the castle in one of the uninhabited parts of it, and by alarming the banditti for their own lives, give him an opportunity of escaping in the general confusion that would ensue. Of  
this

this plan he informed his mother, and she was reluctantly compelled to assent to it.

He had, in the interim, committed to paper many of the particulars of this atrocious conspiracy, thinking it might be essential hereafter to De Willenberg to know them. He had scarcely finished, when Lodovico rushed in—exultation was in his wild countenance and in his voice—his mouth was distended with demoniac laughter.—“Now, now!” he roared, “now for the vengeance of death and destruction! now to sink them all to perdition! I have set fire to the whole building, and every soul of them falls; not one—not a single one can escape the fate that *I* have doomed them to—not even their victim, for they are with him: hah, hah! revenge is mine! I will fly and tell it through the world!”

Like a maniac he darted out, or rather like the arch fiend, Lucifer, shouting, in  
horrid

horrid triumph, "revenge!" as he flung open, with the noise of thunder, every door that opposed him, and effected his escape into the forest.

A flash of lightning in the late storm had struck one of the turrets, and Lodovico having placed some burning faggots against the wood-work of the other, both were by this time in a blaze too violent for any exertions to extinguish.

At this frightful and alarming crisis, it seemed as if Heaven had armed Arnold with superhuman strength and resolution; he rushed from his bed, and imploring his mother instantly to fly and save herself, he hastened to the vault under De Willenberg's chamber, directed to it by the loud clashing of arms and the ferocious voices of the murderers, and providentially arrived in time to rescue their intended victim.

Aware

Aware that to remain in Poland after this would be to risk his own life, Arnold had previously arranged with his mother, that in case of escape they should return to their native country; for it was too much to be feared, that should the duke hear of one of the witnesses of his guilt being thus at large, he would, for his security, take the most effectual means of silencing him for ever.

He had, in Leopold's service, accumulated a sum fully adequate to their future support, and with gratitude to Heaven for being allowed to return to spend the rest of their days in the place that gave them birth, after parting from De Willenberg, they repaired to an inn at some leagues distance, whence, on the following day, they departed for Tuscany.

CHAP.

## CHAPTER VI.

Et si le sort contre elle à ma haine se joint,  
 Je saurai profiter de cette intelligence,  
 Pour ne pas pleurer seule, et mourir sans vengeance.

RACINE.

.....

Bloody instructions, which being taught, return,  
 To plague th' inventor.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE triumph of the wicked Constantia was now almost complete; the cruel sentence passed on the abbess was communicated to her, and she was told at the same time that she and Garcia were at liberty to return to the convent. Her revenge, however, had not yet quite satiated itself, which she determined it should do, ere her departure, in an interview with Stephania. Under pretence of bidding that unhappy woman

woman farewell, she obtained the cardinal's permission to visit her in her cell, where she found her on her knees, preparing in the most solemn manner for death.

At sight of her, the horrified abbess shrank back, as she would have recoiled from Satan, had he come to claim her.—“Hence! hence! thou fell destroyer!” said she, waving her from her. “Art thou come, like the serpent who first robbed mankind of innocence, to poison my last moments by thy detested presence?—Away! away! I dare not pronounce the name of the Divinity whilst thou art here.—it is hell to be near thee; go! go from my sight for ever!”

For a few minutes Constantia neither spoke nor moved, but stood indeed like the great enemy of mankind, glutting her thoughts on crime, desolation, and destruction; her eyes, which looked like  
balls

balls of fire, were intently fastened on her, and, as if she would have destroyed her soul as well as her body, she mocked her devotion with a loud and horrid laugh.—

“ At prayers, deluded fool!” said she; “ and what would you pray for?—for heaven, forsooth!—go to, go to; let those who have *served* Heaven hope reward from *it*—you will have yours elsewhere.”

“ Begone!” again said the abbess, shuddering as she shrunk still farther from her.

“ Ay, canting hypocrite!” resumed the nun, “ tremble at the sight of me; for though I am not Lucifer, you shall know *who* I am ere yet we part—you shall know who and what brought you to this. My name is Maddeline de Klopstock; dishonour made me assume, another—dishonour drove me from the world, and robbed me of all life’s enjoyments. Mark me, woman; that dishonour was heaped upon me by your *brother*—ay, by Eugene, your infamous, perjured, self-damned brother.

From

From that hour, the hour that spread horror and desolation round me, my soul within me thirsted for revenge, great and ample as his crime, direful as hell could wish—and it is mine; to Heaven and to hell I sent my daily prayer for this, and, pitying my wrongs, they heard me—nay, look not thus incredulous or astounded; full well I know you, Stephania Gesnel—full well I knew your father, mother, brother. Accursed for ever be the day that first I saw Eugene! He it was who made me what I am—a wretch; his arts lured me to disgrace—he tempted, ruined, and fled me. But this is not all. I had professed my hand to another; that other spurned me—ay, like a noxious weed, he spurned me—left me to be *pitied* by my friends, to be sneered at by the world, or to be the prey of some vile seducer—he abandoned me to ruin, and soon it overtook me. The serpent Eugene wound round me—wound himself to my very heart; there he planted his deadliest sting; then,

then, darting for ever from the power of the one whose happiness he had poisoned, whose fair fame he had blasted, he left me even to die, should death in pity come to close my woes. Oh! think you all these were to be borne unrevenged?—No; if *they* thought so, they knew not Madeline. I have said the villain Eugene fled; the baron and baroness too escaped my fury; but Heaven in recompence left *you*, Stephania—full exposed, head and front, to the frightful storm; raging, terrible, it fell upon you. But still there is another—Theodore de Willenberg, the one who rejected me; and another—the one for *whom* he did so—the sorceress Victoria; she was the pretended Clara de Manzilla—his sister, forsooth!—Fatal was the hour that brought them to my sight! They suspected me not, but *I* knew *them*, and what *they* had done to *me*. I have destroyed them. Sweet, sweet and glorious is my revenge! Fiend! image of the demon who brought destruction, shame, and ignominy upon me!

me! I have hurled ruin and death upon *your* head; and now vengeance is satisfied—glutted even to satiety; the block, in the black trappings of death, is ready to drink your blood, and the executioner with a single blow to send you to the grave, a headless trunk. Thus then I leave you,” and with another peal of laughter more awfully horrid than the first, she vanished.

Father Raymond the confessor had just quitted the penitent Stephania, and left her in that tranquil state when the lingering soul has made its peace with Heaven, and waits but for its summons. To the ear of that holy man she had poured out all her faults, and repentance and prayer had prepared her to die with Christian firmness, which not even the inhuman exultation of Constantia could shake; she desired now but death, to transfer her spirit from a world she despised, and anxiously she counted the tedious hours that  
brought

brought it nearer to her. But it was now at hand; she had petitioned that her execution might take place three hours before the first-mentioned time, and nine o'clock was therefore the hour appointed by the cardinal for her to suffer.

A little after Constantia left her, the clock sounded a quarter before nine, and presently the door of her cell was thrown open to admit the officials, the harbingers of her fate, who came to conduct her to the block. The dismal sound of a bell echoed sullenly through the prison, which, together with the hollow voices of those that were preparing to attend the awful ceremony, terrified her for a moment, but quickly recovering, she accompanied them with a firm step. The whole face of the heavens was enveloped in darkness, but around the place of execution innumerable torches threw a glare so powerful, that it was with difficulty the eye could support it. A long arcade brought them to the  
street,

street, where stood the platform, arrayed in solemn and funereal hues. With unshrinking fortitude the abbess viewed the preparations, and then her eye ran for an instant over the immense multitude outside the railings, assembled to witness her decapitation: nothing like fear seemed to agitate her.

The voices of two of the priests chanting the execution anthem immediately recalled her attention, and, preceded by the confessor, she ascended the scaffold. Her countenance was perfectly serene—her thoughts appeared to rest on Heaven alone, and she joined with profound devotion in the conclusion of the anthem. As it ceased, the clock struck nine—it was the signal for death. She breathed forth a short prayer; then baring her neck, she meekly inclined her head, and with one sure blow the executioner severed it from her body.

Meantime

Meantime the punishment due to the crimes of the ill-starred Constantia was rapidly approaching; unconscious of its being so near, she had unwarily lingered to hear that Stephania was no more; of this she was informed by one of the officials. Not a shadow of remorse was visible in her demoniac visage, but again shrieking out a wild laugh—"My soul, my frantic soul, be satisfied!" she exclaimed. "Let me now depart," continued she, addressing the official beside her.

"It is forbidden," cried one of the familiars, just then emerging from an opposite door; "you go not hence."

"Who dares forbid it?" she imperiously demanded.

"The cardinal Willeimar," replied the familiar. "His eminence has commanded that this woman," pointing to Garcia, "and you, be instantly brought before their holy court."

Her

Her mind misgave her that she was not yet quite safe, though what to fear she knew not; treachery it could not be, for the only one likely to betray her was Garcia, her accomplice, and she was by her side. Trembling with suspense, she attended the familiar to the hall of judgment, followed by Garcia, and there found that she was indeed betrayed. Two soldiers stood at the foot of the table—they were the sentinels she had bribed at the convent, and one of them, to her amazement and horror, whom she had supposed killed by De Willenberg. She stood aghast, conscious that her guilt was divulged and her doom certain, and fixed on the sentinels a look of burning rage, as if with the fire that flashed from her eyes she would have consumed them.

“ Know ye these men, perjured criminals?” asked the cardinal.

“ Execrable devils! ye have betrayed me!” she furiously screamed: her figure

and face were those of a fiend. She flew towards them, and drawing a stiletto from the scabbard of one of them, she would have sheathed it in both their hearts, had not her arm been seized.

“Now, thrice perjured, thrice accursed!” cried the cardinal, “there is nought but hell awaits you—you are self-condemned: a few words, and you shall know your fate. And you, most abominable reptile in human shape!” said he, turning to the half-senseless Garcia—“you who have joined with that abandoned wretch in murdering the superior of your convent—as you have lived with her in iniquity, so shall you die with her in torments.”

“Confess your crimes, woman,” said one of the priests, addressing Constantia.

“To you, ye mumbling hypocrites, I will confess nothing,” she scornfully replied. “Ye have pronounced me guilty; more ye cannot do than burn or behead me; so to your worst.”

“Your daring will soon meet its reward,”

ward," said the priest. "Are *you* willing to confess?" he demanded of Garcia.

"I am not," resolutely returned the other, following the example of the hardened nun—"I have nothing to confess."

"Away with them both to the rack instantly!" said the cardinal to one of the officials.

They heard the order, and, with looks of contemptuous defiance, suffered themselves to be led to it, while the sentinels repeated the charges against them.

The one whom De Willenberg had wounded was carried, apparently lifeless, to a sort of hospital in the village, where, on examination, the medical attendant found that animation was not wholly extinct; but, from his exhausted state, little hope could be entertained of his recovery. He had bled profusely, but some powerful stimulants being poured into his mouth, the symptoms of life became less and less

equivocal; his respiration gradually grew stronger, and at length he was able to speak. A haggard wildness was in his countenance, and it was some time ere he recollected what had reduced him to such a situation; but Constantia and her plot had made too forcible an impression on him to be long forgotten—he remembered her with horror, both at her own wickedness, and the almost fatal effect of it upon himself; his life had nearly been, nay, still might be, a sacrifice to her iniquitous thirst for vengeance.

This consideration roused him almost to madness; the agony of his wound was excruciating, and he heaped upon her, and upon the one who had inflicted it, the direst maledictions his bad heart prompted. Excessive rage would have hurried him to an end, had not those about him, taking all possible precautions for his recovery, recommended every restraint upon his passions, and administered a strong  
anodyne,

anodyne, to aid their counsel in tranquilizing him ; but the subject of his ravings had not passed unnoticed ; he had implicated one of the nuns in the dreadful transaction at the monastery ; this could not be the fantasy of a disordered imagination, and they therefore thought it right to have it strictly investigated.

Apprehensive that all their exertions could not save him, they sent, while he slept, for a monk, to be ready to receive his confession when he should awake, and to give him absolution ere his departure from earth. The pious father was seated by his bedside when he opened his eyes ; he felt somewhat better, but that feeling, he fancied, was the sure precursor of his dissolution. Under this impression, he was in some measure converted, by the monk's exhortations, to a sense of the solemnity of approaching death ; and believing that his moments were now nearly

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numbered,

numbered, he fully unburdened his conscience of its weight, and revealed all that had passed between Constantia and himself, not excepting his oath: he next divulged her having tampered with the other guard, and, in fine, so deeply criminated the guilty nun, that her death now appeared even more certain than his own. Shocked at such a disclosure, the monk had hardly sufficient command of himself to be able to commit it all to paper; but having taken a brief sketch of it, he was hastening to send it to the Consistory, when the guard, not aware of the frightful extent of Constantia's plot, entreated him to postpone it until the evening.—“Through Heaven's will I may possibly survive,” said he: “some secret inspiration whispers that I shall live to witness myself against this wicked woman: if life so long is spared me, I will do so—yes, I will go to the Consistory, and myself confound her—at every risk I will go.  
The

The sight of me will at once convict her :  
I can then die in peace—let death come  
then when it will.”

It was in vain that they opposed this resolution, and represented the imprudence and the danger to himself of such a journey, should he ever recover so far, which they had no hope of. Firm in his determination, he listened to their arguments unmoved. Heaven did indeed seem to inspire him ; from that hour he rapidly grew better, and his request to have a carriage to remove him to Warsaw in the evening, was at length reluctantly complied with. Struck by the danger and the remorse of his companion, the other sentinel had voluntarily come forward, and corroborated in every thing what he had deposed: he necessarily accompanied him to the Consistory, where their testimony was received, but unfortunately too late to be of any service to the abbess.

In consideration of this confession, the cardinal granted them a free pardon, and they were dismissed. The exertion unhappily proved too much for the wounded man. After his return, a fresh attack of fever came on immediately, and in the course of a few hours brought him to the grave; but he had fulfilled a duty which he deemed essential to his salvation, and, as he had said, he died in peace.

With stoical and almost unnatural fortitude the two culprits bore for a while the torture of the rack; but, totally overcome with agony, Garcia at length uttered a piercing shriek, and fainted the next moment. The cruel wretches, whose office it was to inflict those tortures, still continued their exertions, until, being ordered to take her from the rack, they found that death had anticipated their bloody intentions, and unfastening the chains that bound her, they laid her on a bench—a corpse!

Lest

Lest Constantia should also thus escape the doom intended for her, they commanded that she should be taken down, and the cardinal proceeded then to pass sentence on her. After summing up the evidence of her enormous guilt, and forbidding the slightest hope of mercy, he ordered her to be beheaded early on the ensuing morning, and then her body and head to be burned to ashes at the stake.

The same convulsive and appalling laugh shook her frame as she heard it, and horribly distorted her features. The violent exertion appeared to have torn her heart from its place, and sent to her face its torrents of blood: she reeled into the arms of one of the officials, and, with a chilling scream, bade them conduct her to her cell.—“ Now, ye ministers of hell incarnate, I defy you all !” cried she, as they enclosed her in the frightful dungeon. Taking from her bosom a phial, containing a powerful mineral poison (which, as

if anticipating the end of her wicked career, she had always carried about her), she viewed it for a moment with exultation—"Come," said she, "thou sweet, delicious draught—thou little magic dose, that can baffle even the malice of these fiends, and disappoint them of their prey—come, give wings to my soul at once, that it may fly to Heaven, or to——"

She finished not the sentence—her tongue seemed paralysed for a moment, and she swallowed the fatal drug. She lay for a long time almost stupified by its effects: they were like the violent and benumbing powers of opium; but when they wore off, its succeeding ones were yet more formidable to behold. The most frightful delirium seized her—she felt as if her brain was on fire, her eyes rolled like flaming meteors, the deadly venom preyed upon her vitals, drying up the current of life—she felt as if it was parching the very marrow in her bones,  
and

and turning them all to cinders—her hideous yells filled the prison ; and tearing her hair in frenzied desperation, she dashed herself on the ground, writhing in agonies too horrible to be described. Its violence, however, did not last very long—her pain gradually subsided, and she got ease ; but it was that treacherous respite, the surest harbinger of death, when mortification has commenced within, and she was fully conscious of it.

To the best of the human race the hour of dissolution is an awful one ; what then must it be to the sinner, who even unto that hour has pursued his wicked course ? Those alone—and the world contains many—whose consciences are loaded with crimes equal to Constantia's, can conceive what she now felt ; for no pangs could shut out the retrospection of her past life—no pangs of the body could equal those of the mind, as she reviewed it—as she looked back upon the black terrific catalogue

logue of her offences. But Heaven is all-merciful, and even to the expiring sinner denies not its forgiveness, if repentance, sincere and fervent, urges our supplication for it. Such was Constantia's—she felt that life was fleeting fast, and she employed her few short moments in meek and pious aspirations to the Divinity, deprecating his wrath, and beseeching his forgiveness.

“ How striking a lesson is here to the perfidy of man! what an awful example of its effects!—of him whom Heaven, in its care, created to be the defender and protector of that sex on whom he dares bring shame and ruin—whose weakness he dares basely take advantage of—whom falling he upholds not, but, with the iron hand of seduction and disgrace, weighs her down, till she has sunk to rise no more—till fallen to the lowest and most abject state of degradation humanity *can* fall to, she riots in her guilt, exults in her shame,

shame, and lives but in sin and infamy!—  
then, oh, then, on his head be her sins  
visited!

“Tremble, seducer, at the fabric thou  
hast thus destroyed—at the wreck of in-  
nocence once so fair and lovely! Oh,  
cruel, unfeeling monster, man! that with  
thy smooth, seductive blandishments, canst  
steal into the heart of woman, to rob her  
of virtue—of honour; and rifling these,  
art the more merciless villain to leave life  
behind!—worse than the serpent whose  
wiles seduced our first parents even from  
the shield of heaven-born innocence—steal-  
ing to her heart, to revel and glut thyself  
in momentary sweets, and leave the venom  
of thy sting behind! Like the flower  
plucked from the stem that gives it life  
and beauty, so, woman, the hapless, fragile  
victim of seduction, then withers, droops,  
and dies!”

Such was the soliloquy of the penitent  
nun.

nun. At the last words her voice grew faint, then wholly inaudible; her hands, which she had folded on her bosom, dropped powerless beside her, and a deep-drawn sigh terminated her mortal career for ever.

**CHAP.**

CHAPTER VII.  
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At every step I tread, methinks some fiend
Knocks at my breast, and bids it not be quiet.

OTWAY.

SANGUINE in the hope of success, the duke of Silesia had commenced his intended journey in search of our heroine, determined, should he find her, to obtain her hand at any price. He had taken, he trusted, the most effectual measures to remove De Willenberg; and having now no candidate to oppose him, he also hoped that his love could set aside all other obstacles, and give him Victoria's pure and undivided affection. Ere he left Warsaw, he had anxiously sought intelligence of her amongst her numerous friends in that city; but all were ignorant of her flight, and wholly unable to direct him whither
to

to proceed. Wearied with their conjectures, he took the road to Zersk, where he believed it most likely he should find her; but there, after several hours inquiry, she was not to be heard of.

While deliberating as to whither he should next bend his course, the report of a murder near the convent of St. Agnes reached him, and the elopement of one of the novices of that order, with a young and handsome cavalier, both of whom had been committed to prison. A confusion of ideas, with which Victoria was nearly associated, passed through his mind; that novice might indeed be Victoria herself: yet the murder!—how could it be connected with her—in what way could it relate to her?—and the cavalier, too—oh, no; it was altogether improbable—it surely could not have been Victoria!

The very name of murder now made a coward of him; his terrified imagination was

was haunted by the bleeding form of De Willenberg, whom he had delivered to so shocking a death: he was himself to all intents a murderer, liable every moment to detection and punishment—horrible but to think of! Until now, the magnitude of his guilt had never been so apparent, or so terrible to him; and now that the deed was done, he would have given worlds to have it undone. Conscience rose up in formidable array, picturing a murderer's fate both here and hereafter: his soul grew sick with agony, and had any one been present, he would inevitably have been betrayed. The infatuation that had urged him on was past, and to hear that De Willenberg lived would have been such bliss as even the hand, the heart, and the fortune of the lovely Victoria could not bestow. The very wish seemed to render his existence still possible, and he clung again to the hope that this cavalier was no other than Theodore De Willenberg.

Full

Full of the idea, he hastened to the convent, where he was admitted to the presence of one of the elder nuns. This woman was far from believing that the one with whom our heroine had eloped was her brother. During her residence in the world, her knowledge and skill in intrigues and love-affairs was by no means limited; nor had age nor monastic seclusion weaned her mind from the observations of her youth. She told him all she knew relative to the lover's being summoned, with the superior and sister Constantia, before the Consistory, where she had no doubt of what the sentence of the two former would be—still ignorant of the nun's plot against Stephania.

There remained but one step now to take to put an end to his doubts; and he proceeded thence to Warsaw, knowing that his rank would readily gain him admittance to the Consistory, and procure him an interview with Victoria. As he
rode

rode along the vicinity of the forest, the volumes of smoke that darkened the air informed him of the tremendous conflagration within. This left little doubt of what had happened; but whatever might have occasioned the fire, that De Willenberg should have effected his escape, was now a cause of alternate and different emotions to him. Should it be the case, he was freed from the crime of murder; but when his intention should be known—when De Willenberg should blazon forth the horrid conspiracy to the world, and that he would do so it was natural to conclude, what was to save him from eternal infamy? what was to avert the overwhelming torrent of ignominy and disgrace that would blast his hitherto unsullied fame for ever?—“Yet, better, far better,” said he, “to live amidst the world’s odium and bitterest scorn, than die beneath the weight of sin, and the avenging hand of Omnipotence: what is the odium of this world—what are all its punishments?—

nishments?—I will spurn them! They are but the agents of Satan, to appal deluded man—to scare him from repentance—to frighten him from the path that leads to heaven! Yes, I will meet the storm at once—their scoffs, their censures, all will I bear with fortitude, and rid me of this load of guilt that weighs so heavy on my conscience. They will tell me I have played the villain unsuccessfully—they will fling into my very teeth my baffled schemes, and say, had they succeeded, they had never been revealed—they will tell me, now I make a virtue of necessity: but let them say their worst—I heed them not—I have here a little monitor within, that whispers more than all their tongues can say. Oh! I have been the fatal cause of this night's dreadful doings, and on my head the blood of Theodore and Victoria would cry for vengeance, should they suffer death! While it is yet in human power to snatch them from the verge of the grave, let me, by one great act

act of justice, try to expiate my guilt towards Heaven, and towards them.”

Such were Leopold's reflections on leaving Victoria, after his unsuccessful suit in the prison. Her condemnation was one of the first things that reached his ear on his arrival in Warsaw, and proceeding to the palace, he heard his majesty's lips confirm it. Still hoping to be able to induce Victoria to promise him her hand, and at the same time to save De Willenberg, he had immediately repaired to the Consistory. Of the result of his visit we have already informed the reader.

There is a grandeur and loveliness in Virtue, when she stands forth in her native purity, that involuntarily commands our homage and veneration—a majesty akin to Divinity, that shews her superior to all else on earth—that dazzles by its lustre the eye of the most upright, and strikes
awe

awe to the heart of the most profligate. Her very name—every thing pertaining to her, carry with it a charm undefinable—depravity itself assumes her form, that it may deceive our weak senses, and stalk amongst us in security.

Never is her power or loveliness so pre-
eminent as when Vice shrinks appalled
from her gaze, like the fallen angel be-
fore the majesty of Heaven. Never had
Leopold beheld virtue in a more beautiful
form than that of Victoria—never till now
had her power reached his heart. Struck
by the magnanimity she displayed, never
before had he half so much admired her;
and feeling the influence of goodness, he
wondered how the deformities of vice
could have ever been otherwise than hor-
rible and disgusting to him. From that
moment he felt as it were a new being—
all within him seemed newly organized—
repentance came to his inward heart,
bringing with it sensations infinitely
sweeter

sweeter than all the luxury of guilt had ever imparted, gladdening as the angel of mercy that descends to the despairing wretch.

Thus influenced, as the first step towards atonement, he proceeded to an immediate interview with the king, at one of his country palaces, whither he was gone for the day. It required no ordinary degree of courage and resolution to make such a disclosure, to criminate himself thus deeply, and by confessions of a nature so revolting, to a king and a brother, who had ever held his honour and integrity unimpeachable. To offend the ear of royalty by such a detail of iniquity—to avow to his brother, his friend and his sovereign, the base outrage on fraternal love, on the purity of friendship, on a subject's reverence, and on honour's laws, he had been guilty of—and by such a confession to cover himself at once with endless obloquy!

quy! What a picture was this! it might have shaken the fortitude of a stronger mind than his, had not the contrast been still more frightful in its colouring, dyed deep with the blood of De Willenberg and Victoria!

On reaching the palace he found the king alone, and dejectedly pacing one of the apartments, his arms folded across, and his eyes bent to the floor, while heavy sighs at intervals escaped him. For a few moments he lingered at the threshold, almost irresolute; but the door being ajar, the king observed the shadow of his figure, and he was obliged to enter. His majesty welcomed him courteously, but with something in his manner that seemed as if he would have asked a reason for this unexpected visit. Leopold understood it, and knew not at first what to say: never had he felt so much embarrassment,—reddening with confusion, he turned

ed for a moment towards the window to hide it, but recovering himself, he took a seat at the king's request.

Augustus still walked to and fro, evidently labouring under some mental depression.

“Your majesty seems unlike yourself to-day,” observed Leopold, in a half-playful, half-serious tone: “it is not usual to see your brow thus overcast with clouds of gloomy thought; but mists and vapours sometimes will arise and shade the brightest sun. I pray your majesty, are you not well?”

“I am well, Leopold, as far as regards the body, it is true; but what is corporeal health when the mind is out of order?—a mere bauble—it is as a handsome watch, beautiful to the eye without, but internally deranged.”

“What is it disturbs you?—surely, if one so good can be unhappy, the guilty mind should be most miserable.”

“ To condemn my fellow-beings and my subjects to death ever disturbs me. Know you not that I this day signed the death-warrant for two prisoners of the consistorial court, who have forfeited their lives to the outraged laws of that tribunal? Through me, Justice demands her due, however severe; yet, while my hand signed the mandate for their fate, my heart recoiled, and would not sanction it.”

“ I have ever known you just and merciful, kind and compassionate; I also know that those unhappy culprits have been sentenced to die to-night—this then, my brother, is the cause of your sadness?”

“ Is it not a sufficient cause, duke? I feel for them almost a father’s agonies. It is said they are some high-born pair, whose love being crossed, led them to the rash act—that one of them, endued with more than all her sex’s beauty, and more than manly courage, had not been many hours in the noviciate of St. Agnes, when her lover appeared before her: for his sake
she

she boldly risked the danger of escape, violated her vow, and by what ensued, braved certain death."

"And is there no appeal for them?" asked the duke; "is there no chance of their being spared? Oh, Augustus, you are full of tenderest sympathy—will you not pardon them?—all depends on you."

"I cannot do so—there is no hope for them. Did their offence affect myself individually, I would forgive them; but it is a public cause—the crimes of sacrilege and murder are alleged against them, and they must publicly suffer for them—my commiseration can avail them nothing—justice shall be done."

The firmness with which he said this would have deterred any one but Leopold from importuning farther, and even he almost gave up the cause as hopeless; but its being thus desperate stimulated him still more.—"Nay, my liege," cried he, "they must not die—it were murder in-

K 2

deed

deed if they did. I beseech you, Augustus, for *my* sake save them!"

"Why for *your* sake, Leopold?" asked the monarch, struck by the demand: "say what mean these frantic tones—whence is your agitation—know you the prisoners?"

"Yes, yes, my liege, I know them both."

"Who are they?—speak—your words are full of mystery—why would their deaths be murder?"

"Were it not murder to shed innocent blood? would not that blood, as it poured forth from them, soak in and animate the earth itself to cry for retribution?"

"For Heaven's sake, speak more plainly!—say, who they are—can you prove them innocent?—can you prove that they have not done what they are charged with?"

"Not that, my sovereign—they have, I own, offended against the laws that now would have redress; but let those laws seek that redress from *me*!"

"From

“From *you!*” cried the king, regarding him with a look of astonishment: “what! make the duke of Silesia amenable for the offences of two criminals?—Is your highness *connected* with their crimes, that you must answer for them?—let me understand you.” As he said this, he frowned for a moment with peculiar and chilling severity.

“Oh, would to God,” faltered the trembling Leopold, “that I could convince you of their crimes being mine, and yet conceal the rest! How shall I tell the iniquitous tale to ears of purity—to you, my liege, my brother, who have never done me wrong in word or deed? in what way can I quickest tell how I have deceived you, and debased myself?” His voice sunk, and he could hardly go on.

“Speak to the purpose, duke,” said the king; “if you have deceived me, and that my wrongs are of a private nature, withhold your confession for the present;

but declare how you are concerned in this awful business, and do it briefly.”

Had he not previously fortified himself against every discouragement, he would now have been intimidated from going on; but nerved with more than ordinary resolution, he proceeded: his voice was hurried and confused, as if he would have told all, if possible, in a single syllable.—“Oh, my liege!” said he, “summon all the nobleness of your nature, while in a few words I tell it: yes, I will do so, though at each word I utter your curse should fall on me. One of those convicts is De Willenberg—one whose very life I sought, but the hand of Heaven baffled me: the other is Victoria, Herman’s lovely heiress.—Start not thus, sire, nor hinder me from telling, in one breath, all I have done, lest so much horror seize me that I stop short.—I saw Victoria, and seeing, loved her—knew I had a rival; that rival Theodore—heard you too declare your
honourable

honourable passion, and resolved to marry you both, and gain her to myself. I wrote to Theodore's father in his name—that letter proved his ruin—then hastened to the castle, not to demand her for you, but for myself: ere I arrived she had eloped! Thinking De Willenberg dead (for he had fled the castle on receipt of a letter from home), Victoria sought to conceal her grief in the convent of St. Agnes, while I endeavoured to soothe her father's sorrow at the flight of his darling child, he knew not whither. I vowed to find her, if yet she lived. Overjoyed, he promised me her hand; it was all I wished for: lest he should hear of your majesty's intentions, or the mission on which you had sent me, I spoke of you—how shall I tell it?—I dare not ask your pardon—I belied you—foully misrepresented your pure love, and called it what suited my purpose: yes, told him—told Victoria's father, the king had proposed to make her his concubine!"

“ No more, no more of this,” cried Augustus, gasping with horror, and as he retreated, spreading his hands over his eyes, to shut him from his sight.—“ I can conceive the rest—her lover then returned, found her innured in a monastery, self-exiled through your treachery, and desperate, he released her.”

“ Yes, it would have made Heaven’s angels desperate. Will you not then extend your forgiveness to erring mortals?—visit their guilt on me—pour on me your heaviest displeasure for my baseness—proclaim it to the world—do any thing to cover me with shame; but do not—do not load me with such addition to my crimes, as to have caused their deaths.”

“ Wretched, wretched Leopold! do I live to see you so sunk, so degraded, so covered with wickedness? Oh! what a night of agony to me is this—what a state for Silesia’s duke, prostrated in guilt!”

“ How can I expiate it, sire? Will
you

you not, in mercy to me, to your brother, spare them?"

"Expiate it!" repeated the king, with a groan of anguish, as if his heart would break: "*nothing* can do so—it can *never* be expiated. What! talk of atonement! and to whom, forsooth? To me you have been a traitor—but what of that? Look to count Herman—who dares mention atonement to *him*? Have you not robbed him of his daughter?—have you not consigned her to death by your enormities?—have you not robbed the world of its richest ornament?—have you not destroyed *Victoria*? Who—who but a madman talks of atonement after this? Go—go hence, and leave me to my grief: I dare not say my *brother* has done this." Overcome with emotion, he sunk upon a seat, and hid his face with his hands, while the names of count Herman and Victoria alternately broke from him.

"Oh, no, Augustus, send me not from

K 5

your

your presence until you have promised to pardon them."

"I tell you, sir, I *will not* pardon them," cried the king, passionately starting up: "mistake not my regret for weakness, nor hope through *me* to make your atonement—justice, I repeat, knows no distinction of persons; they have outraged the laws, and they must suffer. Go and atone to Heaven for your crimes, if possible; but to a heart-broken father you *cannot*."

"Now am I truly a wretch—a guilty and forsaken outcast, when my brother, even in my penitence, casts me from him: my misery is complete, and when I die myself matters not to me, nor to the brother who once so loved me."

A tear rolled down his cheek, and he could hardly prevent himself from sobbing aloud. The monarch's countenance softened into something like pity for the fallen Leopold, and every other feeling giving way to fraternal affection, he tried to raise
him

him up, for he had bent on one knee before him.—“Do not humble yourself thus to *me*, Leopold,” said he; “this posture best becomes you in addressing a higher Power—I pray that Power to grant you his forgiveness, as I do mine.”

“Do you—do you indeed, magnanimous being?” exclaimed the duke, pressing his hand in rapture and gratitude; taking advantage of the moment—“Oh, my gracious sovereign!” said he, “you have opened unto me the gates of mercy and forgiveness; close them not, I beseech you, until you have admitted to that mercy and forgiveness the two you have condemned to die.”

The king’s answer was interrupted by the entrance of one of the pages, saying that count Herman had arrived at the palace, and was waiting in the audience-chamber, where he requested the honour of an immediate interview with his majesty.

“ Will you not grant their lives ?” again implored the duke, seizing hold of his brother’s robe, as he moved towards the door : “ if they die, I will not outlive them. Alas, sire ! is it not enough, too much, that *you* know my guilt, and would you really blazon it forth to the universe ? would you make me the scoff, the scorn, the horror of the whole world ? If *not*—if you would not see your brother carried to the grave of those he had sacrificed, then I conjure you spare them.”

“ In vain you urge me, Leopold—such glaring partiality would bring disgrace upon the crown itself : to any thing else you may command me, but this I cannot—will not do. Sad and heart-rending is the task now before me : to see Victoria’s father—to hear the sorrows, to behold the tears, the scalding tears, of shame, streaming down the cheeks of that good old man—to hear his petition for the life of his adored child, and to *refuse* it !—yet it must be done.”

Repressing

Repressing the tears that were almost bursting from himself, the king hurried from the room, leaving Leopold in a state of indescribable agitation, expecting every instant to see the count enter, with looks of indignation and horror, to thunder his malediction on him.

CHAP.

CHAPTER VII.

My task is done—my theme
 Has died into an echo—it is fit
 The spell should break of this protracted dream ;

— — — — —
 Would it were worthier !

CHILDE HAROLD, *Canto IV.*

THE awful situation in which our captives were placed, standing on the very verge of eternity—a scene on which so few of our mortal race are prepared to enter, required that their last hours should be tranquil and undisturbed by any occurrences of the world they seemed likely so soon to quit for ever; very different from tranquillizing were the effects of the packet De Willenberg had just perused. Such a detail of wickedness had, even in those solemn moments, overthrown the firmness of
of

of both, and, with an expression of deep horror, he flung the packet from him.

Of mankind he had until now ever held too favourable an opinion, for he had yet seen but little of the world; never before had he believed *any* of his species capable of such monstrous depravity, much less the haughty insolent duke of Silesia, who, shielded beneath the pageantry of rank, and the veil from which common mortals dared not unmask him, had thus securely, thus long unsuspected, brought his rival almost to the last extremity of destruction.

“ Oh, wonderful, adorable woman!” he exclaimed, regarding Victoria with admiration and almost with awe, “ surely thy loveliness, thy perfections, are more than human! surely some immortal fascination throws its charms around thee, when to possess thee, man deemed his very soul too poor a sacrifice! Art thou a second
Helena?”

Helena?—No, no, ten thousand times more terrible are the effects of *thy* beauty than were all the horrors of the Trojan war. Is he a second Paris who would have wrested thee from me?—No; it was but the siege of Troy followed the rape of Helena—the miseries of a few short years; had Leopold robbed me of *thee*, Victoria, himself, and the country that gave him birth, would have been overwhelmed with disgrace *for ever*.”

“Still am I all your own, my Theodore,” said she, smiling beneficently on him; “even in death shall I be yours—all his machinations we may now laugh to scorn.”

“Oh, do not recall them! name not again that destroying fiend! but he has fallen, thank God, thank God! Like the arch demon, he has fallen from his lofty height, to rise no more—ay, the proud, ambitious, scornful villain, at whose frown or nod so many thousands have trembled, dug a pit to hurl *me* into, and sunk in it himself.

himself. Oh, great Providence, for this once more I thank thee!"

"Be those thanks, my love, for your own deliverance—not for his degradation; you would not trample on a fallen foe." Fixing a look of unspeakable delight on the ever-amiable Victoria, he again took up the packet, and replaced it in his bosom.—"We may yet have need of this," said he; "if *not*, let it perish for ever. More degraded than he is already, Leopold *cannot* be—lower than he has plunged himself, he cannot sink."

As if fate had marked out this day to be one of uninterrupted horror to them, they now heard of what was echoed throughout the prison—the trial and execution of the unfortunate abbess of St. Agnes, and the subsequent conviction and death of the perjured Constantia, and her accomplice, Garcia. Enormous as even Leopold's guilt had been, that of the nun far surpassed it in its own atrocity, and its infinitely

infinitely more terrible consequences—to such events memory furnished not a parallel.

They were now roused from their reflections by the sudden appearance of count Herman, not with the resentful frown of an offended father, not with the severity of one come to reproach them ; but with love, tenderness, and grief, mingled in his features, he presented himself before them.

Victoria thought she had prepared herself for this meeting, but the sudden sight of him was too much for her, and she fell almost senseless into his arms ; a long time elapsed ere she recovered herself. What an agonizing scene for those so dear to each other, to meet under such circumstances !

“ Oh, my father, my beloved father !” said Victoria, concealing her face in his bosom, while the tears poured from her, “ it were better surely had we never met
again,

again, than part as we must part to-night."

"No, my child," replied the afflicted parent, straining her closer to him, and as little able to control his grief, "death will not long divide us: if you die, I cannot survive you; soon—soon shall I be laid in the tomb beside you. Theodore, my dear boy, come hither," said he, stretching forth his hand, and taking De Willenberg's; "who, in our days of happiness, could have foreseen all this? who, when you and my Victoria, but a week ago, smiled in all the felicity of your mutual love, beneath the splendid roof of Herman Castle—who then durst have predicted, that in the next a prison's walls should behold your tears—that, like the felons who deal but in the profits of their vices, ye should be doomed to an untimely death?"

"And comes not one breath of censure from your lips to me? Oh, my lord, know you the share that I have had in bringing your child to this, and yet,
noblest

noblest of men! you do not execrate me in the hour of sorrow?"

"No, Heaven forbid I should! I have heard all, Theodore, and all do I now forgive you."

"My lord, I deserve not this from you, but yet you shall not think me more culpable than I am—here—no tongue can speak my wrongs like these few pages —"

"There needs not this, my friend, to reconcile us," said the count, giving back the packet which Theodore had put into his hand; "my friendship, I repeat, still is yours, warm and unshaken as on the day I promised you my daughter—promised to myself that your wedded love should give joy and blessings to my declining years. Oh, my children! is it thus all my hopes, all my plans, for your happiness must end? is the cold grave to be your bridal bed—a father's lamentation your nuptial song? is my benediction to be bestowed on your lifeless remains? are the
tears

tears of joy to be turned to those of mourning and affliction? is there nobody, is there no power, earthly or unearthly, to save you?"

"There *is*, my lord," said Theodore, in the same mysterious voice; "*I* have that power."

"What mean you?" asked the count, regarding him steadfastly, as if awe-struck at his manner; "are you endued with more than *mortal* power? speak, wonderful being!"

A peculiar brightness danced over De Willenberg's features; there was an undefinable something about him, that looked as if he was really going to employ some supernatural means.

"A charmed gift, my lord, was long since presented to me," said he; "the donor was one whose power none may question; ere I received it, it was invested with this peculiar property, that it should obtain
for

for its possessor the immediate grant of any request worthy of so great a privilege ; that request I have reserved to make of his majesty the king.”

“ Explain, De Willenberg—charm or spell, say what it is. I will myself instantly to the king—what is the gift you speak of?”

“ It is a talisman, but at present I must reveal no more ; it can but act in the presence of him from whom I demand the boon, and to you, count, I will entrust the precious charge ; take this, fly speedily with it to the king—its contents once disclosed, we are safe.”

“ Let me not lose a moment,” cried the count, eagerly seizing the packet De Willenberg held towards him ; “ already have I too long delayed to seek him—I have been to the palace, but there he is not ; be he where he may, a father flying to beg his children’s lives will find him—one kiss, my love, until we meet again ;” and embracing Victoria, he hurried away.

The

The happiest anticipations now for a while filled Theodore's bosom, confident as he was that the talisman he had employed would effectually accomplish his purpose; but all his sanguine hopes failed to disturb the placid serenity with which Victoria awaited the hour for their being brought to the scaffold.

Soon afterwards father Raymond the confessor entered; he was a man of venerable and prepossessing aspect. Holding in one hand a missal, and in the other a small crucifix, he approached them with a look of the tenderest sympathy and pity for their misfortunes; a tear trembled in his eye, and his voice faltered as he spoke. —“The hour is come, my children,” said he, “when ye must think of earthly things no more—this world closes fast upon you both—prepare for death—it is but the transient sleep that will lead you into immortality—kneel with me now and pray.”

As

As he advanced they had involuntarily bent their knees in reverence to him, and they joined him in a long and fervent address to the Deity, into whose awful presence they might so soon be called.

While they were yet kneeling, the clock sounded a quarter before midnight—they suddenly stopped, and a fearful and death-like silence succeeded. The moment was at hand when they were to leave their cell, and proceed to the last scene of existence—the scaffold, and on a signal from the confessor they arose.

“Good God, the count not yet returned!” said Theodore, listening to catch the slightest breath that disturbed the solemn silence, while hope again receding from his bosom, took almost all animation from his features—“if it *should* fail!”

He gazed on Victoria as he ventured this doubt, expecting that she would reproach

proach him ; but she had not participated in his hopes, and she remained silent, unwilling by any observation to depress him still more. A few minutes longer he listened, almost checking his respiration, lest it should keep from his ear the sound of an approaching footstep.

The monotonous silence was at length interrupted by the chiming of the bell, which flung its hollow and chilling knell throughout the building ; it was the signal for the prisoners to be led to execution—still the count came not ; a cold moisture covered De Willenberg's face, the agony of disappointment to his highly-raised hopes nearly convulsed him, and tottering to a seat, he faltered—" If *that* has failed, we are inevitably lost."

Voices were now heard outside mingling with the dreary echo of the bell.— " He comes ! " exclaimed Theodore, starting abruptly from his seat, and a feverish

glow of sudden expectation spreading instantly over his cheek.

* Give way not to such ill-timed joy, my son," interposed the monk; "it is unbecoming at such a time as this, when life and death almost embrace each other."

De Willenberg heeded him not, but stood close to the door, in mute and firmly-fixed attention, waiting for the instant of its opening, to admit, as he hoped, the count.

The footsteps approached, the portal yawned widely on its rusty hinges, and the bell, ringing a horrid and dismal peal, swept more loudly through their cell—three men entered, but not the count. Their persons were muffled in sable cloaks, and their faces, which were of the deepest African black, were incapable of any expression but savage and remorseless cruelty. They were the familiars.—
"Come!" said the three in one voice, terrible

rible and prophetic, and like the dreadful fiends of darkness, they beckoned to their prisoners to follow them.

"Whither?" demanded Theodore, retreating aghast and nearly breathless.

"To death!" responded the three sepulchral voices; "it is the midnight hour— all is ready—come then away!"

As they said this, still beckoning, they stalked with measured strides along the gloomy passage that led to the place of execution, keeping pace with the slow beating of the clock, as it mournfully tolled twelve.

Every hope now fled, again the blood forsook De Willenberg's cheeks, and with his ice-cold hands he strove to support Victoria, as with unsteady steps they followed their grim conductors through the passage, at the extremity of which, the farthest of a long succession of ponderous iron doors opened into the street.

L 2

What

What an appalling scene there presented itself! every thing was complete and in readiness for the ceremony; the scaffold hung with black, on which the abbess had died, stood prepared for their reception; even the executioner already held the axe uplifted, while countless crowds of spectators bent their eyes on the condemned pair, for whose fate innumerable expressions of commiseration were heard. Victoria surveyed all with perfect calmness—death had no terrors for her.

De Willenberg's wild eye rambled to the utmost boundary of the prospect, over which the torches gleamed with a brightness almost intolerable, in search of the count, or a messenger from the king—still neither came, and there was nothing to encourage the slightest hope now that they would, at least time enough to save them.

At the foot of the scaffold they again
knelt

knelt with the confessor; every lingering hope, every chance of life, had faded away; and feeling that it was incumbent on him to prepare himself for an after-state, Theodore joined in the prayers with all the firmness he could command; the anthem was then sung, and Victoria's heavenly voice gave additional sublimity to the holy song. Unaccustomed to strains so exquisite, the whole multitude gazed on her angelic form and face with sentiments akin to adoration; they almost fancied her a being superior to mortal, and a shower of tears from every eye expressed the powerful excitement of their feelings; but Victoria saw them not—she sought consolation from a different source—from the Deity. At the conclusion of the hymn, the official motioned to them to ascend the scaffold; there seemed but a few moments between them and futurity, and embracing each other, they obeyed.

Just as they reached the last step, loud

L 3

and

and reiterated cries withdrew their attention, the multitude gave way, and they beheld count Herman flying towards them, almost breathless with speed and agitation; the glare of the torches shewed joy and horror terrifically mingled in his countenance.

“Desist, desist, dare not to strike!” he frantically exclaimed, and rushing upon the platform, he snatched his daughter in his arms, and bore her half-senseless down the steps, calling to De Willenberg to descend also.

“What means this daring interruption?” demanded the chief official, scowling haughtily on the count; “who has empowered you to do this?”

“Your sovereign has, unfeeling wretch!” replied the latter; “would you still glut your murderous heart on human blood?”

“What said the king, my lord?” hastily inquired Theodore; “bring you no order—no message from him?”

“Yonder

“Yonder he comes himself, my son.”

“Yes, yes, he comes!” echoed several voices in the crowd; “there is the carriage—fall back—make way instantly for his majesty.” The next moment four foaming steeds drew the monarch to the foot of the scaffold, where he alighted, attended by three of his ministers.

Every face beamed with hope and expectation, every individual stood uncovered, and bowed profoundly to their sovereign, who, with the dignity and grandeur of an elevated being, full of power, greatness, and mercy, approached the illustrious captives; they had fallen on their knees before him; taking a hand of each, he raised them up.

“Brave, magnanimous hero!” said he, addressing De Willenberg, “fresh as yesterday, your features and your gallant conduct are imprinted on my memory, never to be forgotten; receive again this

L 4

pledge

pledge of my unalterable friendship (putting a ring on his finger), this ‘ talisman,’ which, with more than magic power, has preserved you; you were my deliverer from death—I will, in return, be yours—ye are both forgiven.”

“ Is this, my liege, the valiant young soldier to whom his country owes such a debt?” asked one of the nobles.

“ Yes, my lord,” replied Augustus, “ he it was, who, reckless of all danger to himself, risked his own life to preserve his sovereign’s.”

“ Be his reward proportioned, sire! the grant of life and honours is even too poor a tribute of our gratitude to him.”

“ Proclaim aloud that they shall live,” resumed the king; “ tell these, my subjects, there is now no cause of grief—chase off the clouds that darken all their features—dry up their tears—tell them the ones for whom they wept are safe.”

“ Let all assembled here rejoice—let them, with one voice, give thanks to Poland’s
land’s

land's monarch, who bids these noble lovers live and be happy."

A tumultuous burst of applause sounded from all quarters; the whole atmosphere rang with acclamations, which, powerfully reverberating, seemed to shake the very heavens—no sounds were to be heard but those of joy—every tongue exclaimed—“ Bless our gracious king! a long and glorious reign be *his* reward! and happy be the pair that thus he pardons !”

In the plenitude of paternal joy and affection, count Herman had again clasped De Willenberg and Victoria to his bosom, silently weeping over them, while the three were yet unable to express their feelings by words.—“ Pardon!” repeated the count, at length raising his eyes towards those of the monarch, which sparkled with unspeakable delight—“ did I not hear that word float like celestial music on the air?”

L 5

“ You

“ You did, my lord; they *are* pardoned, and live to bless each *other* with their love, and make your old age happy.”

A torrent of eloquence seemed struggling for vent in the count's heaving bosom.—“ Oh, my liege!” said he, “ you have restored to me that life which else was fleeting fast. Ere you can know the rapture it returns with, ere your heart can feel what mine does now, you must be first a father: may you be such! and may your royal offspring, as they grow up and imitate your virtues, bring to your breast transports equal to mine! But it is not for words to tell my feelings, sire—it needs a language of no common nature to paint that heavenly virtue, gratitude; but its twin-sister, mercy, sits enthroned within your royal bosom, and will tell you the sweet sensations of a grateful heart.”

To the remainder of this unparalleled scene it is impossible for any language to do justice; but the consummation of their
happiness

happiness was yet to come—the favour of their sovereign was yet to be more fully manifested.

As soon as our hero and heroine were sufficiently themselves, they accompanied his majesty, with count Herman, to the palace; there, at his pressing invitation, to remain, until the performance of that ceremony which would reward the constancy, and make ample amends for the severe trials, of the amiable lovers.

They had not long arrived there, when, covered with shame and remorse, the penitent Leopold stood before them. At the first moment of beholding him, De Willenberg's face glowed with furious indignation; the recollection of all the miseries he had brought upon him rushed afresh to his memory, and he would have betrayed the strong resentment he felt, had not the dejected looks and altered demeanour of the duke disarmed it.

“ De

“ De Willenberg,” said he, “ I can perceive the conflict of feelings you fain would conceal; I came prepared to bear your heaviest denunciations—to hear your bitterest upbraidings—for I deserve them all; yet, ere you pour them on me, listen to the full and unreserved avowal of my past conduct, and the motives that influenced me—hear it, as the worthiest restitution I can make you, now that you are yourself restored to the world, with that loveliest of women who will so soon be all your own.”

“ Yes, Leopold,” said the king, “ such confession is a duty which justice to all parties imperatively calls for. I have prepared my noble friend, count Herman, to hear it; and he, as well as those whom it more nearly concerns, will, I trust, listen with clemency and forbearance.”

That they would do so, was evident in the benignity of their looks, from which he anticipated the forgiveness they were ready

ready to offer him. At any other time, what a humiliating task would this have been to the hitherto haughty and imperious duke of Silesia! But the defeat of his schemes had subdued his pride, compunction had reformed his heart, and he was now encouraged to complete the work of repentance he had begun; the detail was a painful one to all, but he gave it with firmness and composure; and they heard it, as they had promised, with all the clemency he hoped for.

When he had concluded, De Willenberg respectfully approached him and took his hand, while the magnanimity of his manner filled all present with admiration.—“Duke,” said he, “if the humble tender of forgiveness can reconcile us—can blot the past transactions from your memory, it is yours—fully and unequivocally yours; regard it all but as a dream, and henceforward let it be consigned to eternal oblivion.”

“You,

“ You, my amiable friend,” replied the duke, pressing the hand he held—“ you will, I trust, in time forget it, but never can I: *me* too you must consign to the same oblivion as I shall do the world.— Hear now my unalterable resolve—unalterable, I repeat,” proceeded he, addressing himself to the king, “ that you, sire, may not, from brotherly love or aught else, oppose it. I will, in a few days, relinquish the court and military dignities I at present hold, and retire to a Benedictine convent about twenty leagues from Warsaw—there, in seclusion that best befits a penitent sinner, to spend the remainder of my life. Think not that, in doing this, I shall sacrifice any thing so dear to me as your society; but the busy scenes of the world would be irksome to me, and recall things that retirement may banish. Knowing this to be my *wish*, I pray you do not vainly try to dissuade me from it. One thing more now, of no less importance—the disposal of my ample fortune.

De

De Willenberg, we are once more friends—sincere friends; permit me to exercise the privilege of friendship—to regard you as a brother—as a proof of that regard, and the high estimation in which I hold you, to settle on you half my fortune.”—Here Theodore was about to interrupt him, but was prevented.—“Nay, De Willenberg, if I *do* possess your friendship, I will brook no refusal; if *not*, then disavow it at once, and spurn the humbled Leopold as he deserves.”

Theodore scarcely knew how to reply to this; to utter a decisive negative against receiving so magnificent a present, might perhaps be misconstrued into a contemptuous rejection of it, and he deemed it still more culpable to let him hope that he would accept it. Seeing him waver, the duke continued—“There is yet another who must share my wealth—the young count Bertonville; his mother promised her permission that I should provide for him—the advantage of that promise I now claim,

claim, by which the greater part of my personal estates shall be secured to him for ever. The remainder I will reserve, to enable me in future, even in a monastery, to distribute joy, happiness, and comfort, to all around me."

In vain every argument, every objection, was urged against these proposals—in vain De Willenberg and count Herman combatted them—opposition entirely failed, and Leopold carried his point; not all their entreaties could prevail on him to retract his determination of retiring to a convent; and having made the necessary preparations and arrangements, the following week beheld him a member of the order of St. Benedict.

Meantime the count returned to Herman Castle, bringing joy and gladness to every heart; he was charged with an invitation from the king to madame Bertonville, to accompany him back on a visit to
his

his majesty, in order to be present at his daughter's nuptials, which were to take place in a few days.

In secret and in silence the amiable brother and sister shed tears of rapture at the unexpected restoration of two so dear to them as Theodore and Victoria, while every other individual within and without the castle gave loud and public demonstrations of genuine joy and sincere attachment to the illustrious house of Herman. An event on that occasion, too, not the least memorable, was the marriage of Conrad to his faithful enamorata, the fair Barbara.

That nothing might be wanting to render the approaching union at the palace a scene of perfect happiness, the king had also sent to invite madame De Willenberg. Never before had the fond adoring mother received an invitation so truly delightful to her, or one which with more
alacrity

alacrity she acceded to: to behold her son blooming in the midst of health and felicity, possessed of the lovely wife his heart had chosen, was one of her first wishes, and soon that wish was most amply gratified. The day of her arrival in Warsaw witnessed his high promotion in the army, as well as in the favour of his sovereign, who, to annihilate, if possible, every memento of Theodore's misfortunes, issued a mandate to have the Forest of Death hewn to the ground.

In point of fortune, our hero was no longer an unequal match for the heiress of Herman Castle; the count Koningern shortly afterwards dying without issue, generously bequeathed back the whole of the property of which his cruel and unrelenting father had so long deprived him, and which, joined to Victoria's vast possessions, enabled them to vie in splendour with royalty itself.

Ere

Ere the marriage could take place, it was necessary to obtain a bull from his holiness the pope, to absolve Victoria from her conventual vow; for this purpose the king dispatched a courier to the court of Rome, and the day of his return was the one nominated for the magnificent nuptial ceremony at the palace. The preparations were completed for it in a style of almost unprecedented grandeur; but the most gratifying mark of the royal favour was evinced at the conclusion of the sacred rites, when De Willenberg and his beautiful bride knelt to receive their sovereign's benediction. Smiling with the sweetest expression of benevolence on the interesting pair, he took a hand of each with paternal affection, and joined them.—“Thus do I hail this auspicious union,” said he, “and bless your wedded love. May ye be as happy as ye deserve! May Providence bestow his choicest gifts on you—give you long life and health, with every virtue that makes us amiable! May every succeeding
succeeding

succeeding year increase your joys! and when, in nature's course, ye sink into the peaceful tomb together, may heaven be yours!—ye can desire no more."

THE END.



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