CONFESSIONAL OF VALOMBRE.

A ROMANCE.

Printed by Lane, Darling, & Co. Leadenhall-Street, London.

THE

CONFESSIONAL OF VALOMBRE.

A Romance.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

LOUISA SIDNEY STANHOPE,

AUTHOR OF

MONTBRASIL ABBEY; THE BANDIT'S BRIDE; STRIKING LIKENESSES, &c. &c.

Oh, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul; and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words! SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. IV.

LONDON:
PRINTED AT THE
Minerva-Press,
FOR A. K. NEWMAN AND CO.
LEADENHALL-STREET.
1812.

THE

Confessional of Valombre.

CHAP. I.

What a state is guilt,
When every thing alarms it! like a sentinel
Who sleeps upon his watch, it wakes in dread,
Even at a breath of wind. HAVARD.

THE accustomed revelry of intemperance had closed the dangers of a successful enterprize, and most of the banditti had reeled to their several couches, when Montauban, less inebriated, quitted the council-hall. As he ascended the staircase leading to his own chamber, a figure glided swiftly past him, whispering as it

fied—" *Montauban, repent!*" His eyes caught the form, and the glance paralyzed every nerve; the light fell from his hand, for it was shrouded in the cloak and scapular of a religious order, and instantly recalled to his guilty mind the abbot St. Theodore and *the confessional of Valombre.* Dead to every exertion, his knees shaking with fear, and his eyes closed, though in darkness, he stood in expectant horror, when the voice again repeated—"*Montauban, repent! the murderer may hope for pardon!*" No groan, no sigh escaped him; sensation, life, alike receded, and he fell from the summit of the stairs.

Of what materials the ghostly adviser was composed, we will not attempt to delineate; but humanity was certainly not banished the catalogue; for though he

he neither spirited him from the dark passage into the contrasting comfort of his own apartment, nor healed the bleeding wound in his temple, still he alarmed the slumbering Randolphe, and summoned to the aid of the prostrate Montauban the timely assistance of his own associates.

Borne to his chamber, animation restored, his wounds dressed, and his bruises examined, still the cheering rays of the light, and the more cheering presence of Randolphe, banished not the appalling counsel of the monk. "*Montauban, repent!*" breathed in every echo; and where'er he turned, the spectre-image seemed to glide. Writhing with pain, scorched with fever, and tortured by the wild flights of delirium, his ravings became unceasing; but Theodore's name sounded in each low appeal; and ever in

the transient indications of returning reason, he called upon him, he solicited his presence, then whispered—" Mine's the power of reparation!"

It was on the second night of Montauban's illness, when Memory, armed with her scorpion stings, recalled the past, and checked the approach of sleep, when restless, languid, his aching eyes rolled round the chamber, and his oppressed and tortured heart envied the trance which steeped the senses of Randolphe, that he heard his name thrice whispered; it seemed the call of death—the dreaded summons to eternity. The power of speech was blasted; not a shriek, nor e'en a groan, escaped him; fear froze each effort, and palsied every limb. " *Montauban,*" it softly murmured, " *Montauban, repent!*" and then the

clock,

clock, chiming the last quarter after midnight, deadened each lesser sound; and then the door slowly opening, disclosed the blackened shadow of the monk: the cowl was closely drawn; yet did fancy, piercing its thickened folds, picture the marbled features of St. Theodore. Even in the earth would the appalled Montauban have shrunk—even with the most abject slave would he have changed conditions: power could not aid him now—riches could not chase the harrowing sight; hell seemed to open to his view, and its sulphureous gulph yawned ready to receive him: he durst not call on Heaven, for Heaven's high ordinations had he violated; he could not call on death, for death was the passport to eternal torture; and yet his trembling lips

framed, midst the conflict of his soul, a something like a prayer.

The monk advanced; with slow and measured step he crossed the chamber, and at the bed's foot paused—"*Montauban,*" he solemnly articulated, "*Montauban, repent! purge the fell stain of sin, and live hereafter!*" He threw his tunic back—he bared his skeleton arm—"*Montauban,*" he continued, "*view well these shrunken sinews, once, like thine, dipped, dyed in blood; Heaven has washed the stain, and Mercy smiles acceptance.—Repent! Montauban, repent!*"

Deep and unbroken was the stillness which succeeded; yet the monk moved not; motionless he stood, his head bending towards the earth, his hands crossed, as though in deep communion.

Appalling

Appalling is the influence of conscience: though life and animation rallied to the heart of Montauban; still was he chained in breathless attention; he could not question what he feared to hear—he could not solicit what anticipation pictured.

The confessional of Valombre resolved the visitation; for to the shrouded dead was the mysterious injunction assigned. Time had been, when he could have sought, he could have wooed elucidation; but now, passive, inactive, all energy, all spirit failed, for the courage Nature had given, guilt had blasted. Bitter was the sigh which the figure breathed, as, with noiseless step, he retreated towards the door; and then again he pronounced—"*Repent! Montauban, repent!*" and vanished.

It seemed as the quick transition from death to life, from the dense vapours of a fetid atmosphere, to the pure ether of unclouded space; the voice, the powers of Montauban returned; he started, he called on Randolphe; but Randolphe slept too sound to heed his feeble efforts. Again the bandit sank upon his pillow; and though his eyes, as the lone bird is by the serpent's fascination drawn, rested on the opened door-way, no more in shrouded vision did the spectre-monk fill up the space; yet the deep accents of his voice could not in blank oblivion die; his ear re-echoed back the fearful admonition which, like a death-peal, struck upon his heart—"Like mine," he articulated, as Memory's faithful hand opened the page of past existence, "like mine, dipped, dyed in blood. Ermissende,"

sende," and a transient glow of love thawed the iced horror of his cheek, "Ermissende, did the arm which vowed to guard thee blast all thy sweetness?—Unhappy partner of illicit love! dear, first exciter of transporting passion!"

Here might we dive at once beneath the veil, and read the hidden source of action; but policy, checking the truant flights of Fancy, dips her spunge into the Lethean stream, and quick erases the transcript of Montauban's contrition. No, gentle lady, 'tis for thee to extend the grant of patience, nor close the page, because the uncloaked truths are not here recited. The morning's sun chased not the gloomy horrors of the night; for the cramped soul, by sin enchained, feels not the gladsome influence of revi-

ving nature, but sickens midst creation's burst of praise.

Sleep frightened, banished, Montauban watched the rising orb of day; he saw the earth's blue mists roll before his effulgent strides, and the wrapt landscape, starting out of darkness, live; he saw the towering pines bend to the passing breeze, and the rude outline of prospect-closing mountains glow with innumerable tints; yet not for one moment did he forget his ghostly visitant—not for one moment did his ear lose the appalling sound of *Montauban, repent.* Called upon, as it were, from the grave, his health debilitated, and his nerves unstrung, what but reparation could atone for past enormities, and reparation alone pointed to the absent Theodore—"Yes, he must be summoned"

summoned!" exclaimed Montauban, as his eyes again shrunk from the opened door-way; "this day, this hour he must be recalled!"

"Who?" demanded Randolphe, starting from slumber.

"You must fly!" pursued the bandit, raising himself upon his elbow, and seizing the arm of the robber, "Randolphe, you must fly from Vermandois; you must trace the footsteps of Theodore, and quick conduct him hither."

Randolphe muttered some indistinct response; and was again sinking to forgetfulness, when Montauban, with a transient exertion of strength, rudely shook him, and sternly bade him rise. The robber grumbled; yet he stood at the bedside of the chief.

"This night has been a night of hor-

ror!" exclaimed the shuddering Montauban.

"Meaning," said Randolphe, smiling significantly, "it has been a night of dreams."

"Could a dream have opened yon door?" interrogated Montauban.

"Not a dream," replied the robber, "but the wind."

Montauban shook his head.

"'Tis high time," pursued Randolphe, "we returned to the cavern: by the mass! if we tarry here much longer, we shall bury all our courage in the ruins."

"My courage is unshaken," warmly observed Montauban; "cope me with human strength, and I shrink not from the conflict."

"True," said Randolphe, smiling ironically, "there you meet your match; but

but in a battle with the devil, a man stands but a poor chance."

"Your jest is misplaced," sternly rejoined Montauban. "This night has pointed out one tract of duty, which my feelings enjoin;—this past night——"

"What of the opened door?" interrupted Randolphe.

Montauban shuddered; then, with a deep and hollow groan, resumed—"Ere yon rising sun has tinged the tops of the mountains, you must be beyond the pine-forest; Randolphe, you must hasten to Lurenville Abbey—you must seek the wanderer, Theodore."

"And what must I tell him?" questioned the robber.

"Tell him," repeated the chief, musing; but imagination wandered, and all alike was lost; his eyes were fixed on the opposite

opposite passage, and his hand was pressed upon his forehead.

"Must I say 'tis illness?" resumed Randolphe, "or fright? or the fancied vision of the night? or——"

"*Fancied!*" interrupted Montauban.

"What else?" demanded Randolphe.

"Question me not," said Montauban; "fly to Lurenville Abbey, and recall Theodore."

But when, in conformity to his order, Randolphe quitted the chamber, he would have bade him tarry, had not shame checked the effort; fear subdued every power of exertion, fear filled his fevered brain with a thousand images. In vain he argued with his feelings, in vain he mourned the lapse of courage; every passing sound was magnified into some portentous omen; and when the intersecting shadow

shadow of the pines, bending to the breeze, transiently darkened the chamber, the shrouded outline of the monk was again conjured into being. Such was the effect of fear on his deeply-disordered mind, that the fever of delirium returned; and when Randolphe entered the apartment, he found him yielding to all the wild wandering of frenzied irrationality; yet was the name of Theodore pronounced with anxiety and eagerness; and in each momentary flash of reason, his desire to behold him more apparent.

Trembling for the safety of their chief, for guilt often links the chain of unanimity, and establishes, even in minds depraved, the strong cement of interest, the troop courted each promise of alleviation. They remembered that Montauban had often, by daring exploits and unshaken

unshaken courage, led them on to victory, that he had shared each hardship, and oft neglected self, to aid a wounded compeer; and now that he was disabled, fallen, a prey to weakness and imagined terrors, they felt upon humanity a claim, which honour might have sanctioned. Randolphe, in search of Theodore, was dispatched from Vermandois; and while, vainly conjecturing the interest which yoked the fates of the bandit and our hero, he pursued his toilsome path, Montauban, from the rough uncourtly hands of his associates, experienced a solicitude, an eager anxious attention, which might have graced a juster cause.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

"Too late Repentance comes not:
E'en on the bed of death, when spectre fear,
Dip'd in the gall of poisoned memory,
Peoples the gloom, she calms the fever'd start,
And sooths the anguish'd soul; she whispers pray'r,
And as the balmy dew from Heav'n descends,
Moist'ning Nature's parch'd and burning bosom,
So does she sooth the guilt-seer'd mind, and gild
The evening with the ray of mercy."

The tapers gleamed upon the death-cold face, the requiem for peace had died away, yet still audibly sounded the sobs of the sisterhood. They were assembled around the bier of the departed Laurette; their hands were still clasped, their hearts were still elevated in prayer; yet did the last mournful moments linger, and mock each effort at composure; yet did the anguished struggles of nature, the

the piteous supplication for mercy, dwell upon the ear, and baffle the appeal for resignation. Long drooping beneath the endurance of severe penance, long the despairing victim of remorse, the suffering Laurette, shrinking from the voice of comfort, from the alleviations of sympathy, had courted the woe of solitude, and the mortifications of restriction. Gradual had been the approach of dissolution; yet the spirit humbled not with the flesh; she felt the rapid inroads of disease; yet with that inconsistency which had ever marked her character, did she firmly resist the exordiums of the mother-superior.

It was at the close of devotion, in which, with more than usual fervour, she had joined the psalmody of the sisters, that supported by the arm of Louisine, she

she repaired to her favourite avenue of cypress in the garden: the moon was slowly rising, and the dark clouds, gathering o'er her disk, ever and anon eclipsed her brightness. The dark eyes of the nun were fixed upon it; her veil was thrown back, and as the softened tint reflected on her features, it gave them an expression of more than usual sadness; she seemed lost in self-communion—she seemed revising the "deeds of other years," and courting the gnawing canker melancholy; and when Louisine gently chided the indulgence, she started, and heaved a sigh of the most bitter sorrow.

"Let us return," implored Louisine; "sister, the dew rises, and the languor of debility demands caution."

Laurette smiled—"Dost think," she faintly murmured, "caution can repair the

the ravages of remorse?—dost think it can bind the bleeding wounds of memory, or heal the anguish of a breaking heart?"

"No, but it can restore health," said Louisine, "and lengthen the salutary years of penance."

"My years—my days—my hours are drawing to a close," solemnly rejoined the nun; "soon will the casual step press upon my grave, nor mark, e'en with a sigh, where my remains shall moulder. Alas! as I have lived unblessed, so shall I die unmourned."

"Not unmourned—not unpitied," exclaimed Louisine; and the starting tear fell unchecked upon her bosom; "compassion will note ever the silent resting-place, and prayer will humbly plead the dawn of mercy."

The

The nun breathed a shuddering sigh; she raised her clasped hands to Heaven, then, drawing her veil over her face, paused irresolute. Suddenly she grasped the hand of Louisine, and pointed to the silver moon—"There no secrets are hid," she articulated, "there our deeds are registered. Weak girl! you know not the wretch for whom your prayers would crave—you know not the damning deed which presses on her soul!" Louisine shuddered, for still the heavy hand of the nun rested on her arm; and though her features were hid, her voice, her action, betrayed her feelings—"Louisine, can the busy instigator of murder hope for peace?" she continued—"can tears wash away the stain of blood?—can remorse find favour in the sight of Heaven?"

"We are told atonement never comes too

too late," replied Louisine; "we are told that reparation——"

"Then am I lost," fearfully interrupted the nun, "for reparation is not mine to give; the grave is shut against it; I felt no mercy—I showed no mercy—I told him not to spare one life; how then can I ask for mercy?"

"Sister, fly to the feet of our holy mother," urged Louisine; "tell her your heart is changed—tell her——"

"Yes, yes, it is changed, Heaven knows it is changed," again interrupted Laurette; "for I have lived to bless the hand which tore me from evil; once I cursed him—cursed my husband! Ah, 'tis a sad story! but now, at the altar's foot, I bless and pray his pardon."

"Surely," softly observed Louisine, "confession would alleviate the woes of memory

memory—would lighten the pent-up heart."

Laurette started, not in anger, neither, as heretofore, did contempt or scorn give point to her reply; she meekly crossed her hands upon her bosom, as she articulated—"Our own efforts be our chief reliance;" then taking the arm of her young companion, she proceeded a few paces; but suddenly pausing—"What penance can man award," she demanded, "which my stricken heart has not exceeded?—Have I for years known joy, or relaxed my care-worn features with the smile of cheerfulness?—have I not foresworn all intercourse which could assuage?—have I not torn from rest the salutary balm of oblivion?—What more, to appease the wrath eternal, can man enjoin

enjoin—what more, to mortify the flesh, can the spirit sanction?"

"True," said Louisine; "and yet, sister, the sacred tenets of faith should be duly practised. How can we be said to die in Christian charity, when perversely we reject all counsel, and despise all succour?"

"Lead me to the confessional," said the nun, musing; "I will acknowledge all—not one transgression shall be hid; I will say that I was vain, credulous, ungrateful, an apostate to my vows, a wretch devoid of humanity and honour. Ah, innocent happy girl! you too shall have reparation—you——"

"Me!" interrupted the astonished Louisine; "sister, you have never harmed me."

"Jesu

"Jesu Maria!" articulated the nun, dropping the beads of her rosary, "never harmed you! I have poisoned your hopes—murdered your parents—blasted your inheritance.—Oh!" with a convulsive sob, "*never harmed you!*"

"You are deceived," said Louisine; "poverty is my inheritance: my father lives; and for my hopes——"

"'Tis false!" interrupted sister Laurette, with all her wonted fierceness; "Vermandois bribed too high—Montauban's dagger was unerring."

"Vermandois!" echoed the trembling girl, for the words of the marchioness de Lurenville recurred to memory, and filled her mind with suspicion and dread.

"Do you know him?" eagerly demanded the nun.

"No," hesitatingly answered Louisine; "but I know——"

"What do you know?" again burst from the lips of the nearly-convulsed Laurette.

"Alas! I know nothing," mournfully replied Louisine; "mine is but wild surmise—is but a shapeless dream."

"Give that dream expression," implored the nun; "tell me your thoughts—tell me what brought you hither—tell me the secret, the imperious source of action?"

"Alas! you are so wild, or else——" faltered Louisine.

"Heed not my wildness," said the nun, grasping her arm with shuddering horror. "Tell me your knowledge of Vermandois?"

Violent

Violent were the emotions of sister Laurette, as Louisine recited the little tale of her sorrows; but when she heard, that even at the altar's foot, the discovered miniature of her mother had changed pretended passion into insatiate rage and dire revenge, conviction seemed to press upon her mind, and freeze the vital current at her heart. Long, with statue-like apathy, did she stand, unmoved by importunity or remonstrance; her features marbled as though in death, lost to the transient flush of animation; and when thought and exertion returned, her first demand was to behold the picture—her first effort to extend her hand to receive it—"Lead me to the confessional;" she again implored; "this is no ideal vision—this is no sudden start of fancy." Her eyes were fixed upon the

little image, and her whole form became convulsed—"Lead me to the confessional; be quick, or the power of reparation will be lost; death will not tarry; be quick, or injustice triumphs."

"Sister, you waver," said Louisine, softly essaying to steal the miniature from sight; but the nun more firmly grasped it; and as she raised her skeleton hand to her burning forehead—"No, no," she quickly rejoined, "I do not waver; all is registered here; this is but the painted shadow of her I have wronged. Lead me to the confessional, and I will make reparation; I will blazon the tale of your injuries—I will bid our holy mother espouse the cause of the orphan. Fear not, wronged girl, you shall be avenged! The murderer shall be hurled from his seat; the murderer—Vermandois—your uncle

uncle—the usurper of your rights—the destroyer of your parents. Louisine," panting, gasping for breath, " he, 'twas he, the serpent, who lured me into a gulph of sin so black, that all my former crimes were white, were spotless to it." She paused for a moment; then, with a hurried step, pressed forward.

" Suffer me to support you," said Louisine, quickly pursuing.

The nun took her offered arm; she forced a melancholy smile—" True," she articulated, " I am weak in body; strength copes not with resolution; debility and death presses hard; one little exertion, and all will be over. This night, this hour I go to the confessional; to-morrow may be too late."

" Your spirits are hurried," said Louisine; " perhaps——"

"No, no," interrupted Laurette, still pressing forward. "Once, like the jarring elements, my heart was torn, was tossed by conflicting passions; once no comfort, no hope, no heavenly irradiation beamed upon my guilty mind; all was alike blank, desolate; but now, prayer has dissipated the gathering mists of despair, and opened the pass to mercy, through the benefit of repentance. Come on, my daughter, let us to the confessional." But momentary was the flash of strength, transient the effort of exertion; her limbs trembled; and ere she reached the extremity of the cloisters, weakness compelled her to stop, and cling for support even to the feeble arm of Louisine.

"You are ill, sister," softly observed the alarmed girl. "Tarry in peace till to-morrow." "To-

"To-morrow!" interrupted the shuddering Laurette; "who knows upon whom to-morrow's sun may dawn?" and then, as though conscious of the short limitation of her existence, she again attempted to advance.

It was long, and with many pauses, ere she reached the presence of the superior; but life, almost expired, yielded to the struggles of fortitude, and terrifying was the swoon which steeped her senses. Unresisting, borne as though already dead, she was conveyed to her cell; and when again animation and memory returned, her eyes sought out the weeping Louisine, and her lips articulated—"Reparation." Gradual was the approach of dissolution; but though her limbs were cold and powerless, her mind lost not its strength and action. She

could, she did revise the past; she could dwell with regret on the early deeds of sin, and caution the gay and unthinking against each lapse of error; but she paused not there—she courted the alleviating balm of confession, and implored, with meek humility, the prayers of the sisters. Every wish complied with, every fear silenced, the cell cleared, and the priest admitted, long and unbroken was the sacred conference; no sin was left untold, no mystery unravelled. The heart lightened, the mind at ease, grasping at the absolving cup of salvation, the contrite, the dying Laurette, in the forgiving spirit of true piety, blessed e'en the author of her guilt, and pronounced the balm of universal pardon.

Again surrounded by the sisters, again supported by the arm of Louisine, the

feeble

feeble glare of the taper dissolving the midnight gloom, and the deep and measured sob of grief mocking e'en the boasted strength of endurance, the nun Laurette betrayed no start of frenzy, breathed no expression of fear; she was placid, she was composed, she was quickly stealing from life to death; and as a calm succeeds a storm, so did humility and meek submission soften the rugged outline of harsh discordant passion. Night waned away, and morning, faintly blushing, eclipsed the taper's glare. The nun raised her heavy eyes, she fixed them on the dappled dawn of day; she saw the level rays of glory pierce the eastern hemisphere, and heard the mountain lark his early tribute pay. A smile marked the expression of her features—she raised her clasped hands—she whispered, "Mer-

the bandit—"I have performed my duty," he at length faltered, vainly struggling to suppress his agitation; "Nature held the first claim upon my heart, and love yielded to her decision."

"Keep it," said Montauban; and suddenly yielding to a new softness of feeling, his arms were extended, and he clasped, in the ardour of fresh-awakened affection, the astonished Theodore—"How can I recompense this sacrifice?" he asked. "Strange, wonderful being! how can I reward this heroic flight of virtue?"

"By renouncing the shackles of sin," eagerly replied Theodore; "by courting peace in the exercise of duty. Father, give me but one blessed intimation of repentance, and my reward is complete."

Montauban, after a long pause of thought,

thought, rejoined—"Be your happiness my present care. Theodore, you shall return to Lurenville Abbey—you shall become the husband of the lady Juliette."

Ah! what joy, what rapturous exultation pervaded the heart, danced in the eyes, glowed upon the cheek of Theodore! yet short was the trance of bliss—"Never," burst from his lips, as he remembered his origin, as he gazed on his father, "no, never, though I love her next to Heaven."

"Not even to snatch her from misery?" observed Montauban, with a smile of incredulity.

"Not selfishly to ensure my own happiness," replied Theodore; "not to ransom my existence, would I entail on her a lineage so disgraceful."

"You are mistaken," exclaimed the bandit, with momentary pride; then suddenly

denly recollecting himself, he continued —" Theodore, prepare to depart; danger lurks in delay; you shall wed, yet not disgrace Juliette."

Theodore shook his head in despondence.

" Tarry longer," pursued Montauban, " and the power to rescue will be passed. Vermandois seeks now his bride: aided by a father's sanction, should the altar's sacred rites, even by force, confirm her his, then is she lost for ever."

" For ever!" echoed Theodore; and with an elastic spring, he bounded towards the door. What was danger, what was distance, in an enterprise in which his whole heart was centered! To save Juliette, to snatch her from misery and woe, perhaps——Theodore paused, Theodore dared not solve that perhaps; he felt he

was

was human nature; he felt that even enthusiasm may be strained to too high a pitch.

"Promise me," said Montauban, again recalling him, "when you have delivered that paper—when you have traced its effect—when you know the lady Juliette in safety, to return to Vermandois. Stay not to answer the idle questions of curiosity; breathe not the secret hold I have upon your duty; neither let the sigh of love betray your hidden interest. Suspicion, rage, disappointed passion, may arm with deadly fate the hand of the duke; fly him, nor suffer threat, or treacherous entreaty, to withhold you."

"What can he suspect?" demanded Theodore, vainly seeking to solve the motives of Montauban.

"No

"No matter," replied the chief; "promise all I require; promise to return without delay, and then farewell!"

"I do!" exclaimed the impatient Theodore; "once rescued from Vermandois's power, not even the smile of Juliette shall restrain me."

"Enough," said Montauban; and then he pressed his hand in adieu; and then from his opened window he watched the retreating steps of the youth, until he lost him in the pine forest.

Theodore, with a mind more than ever perplexed, forming a thousand inconsistencies, and smiling at the wild flights of uncurbed fancy, retraced the path he had so recently trodden; sometimes, with wonder, musing on the influence which the bandit assumed o'er the actions of the

the duke de Vermandois; and sometimes gazing on the sealed paper he conveyed, till doubt almost banished probability.

We will not tend the wearied footsteps of our hero, neither will we note the rocky nook in which exhausted Nature sought the renovation of repose; but will quick convey him to the cottage bordering the domain of the marquis de Lurenville, the cottage which had before been his habitation, and which the fairy artist, delusive Love, had eternalized on memory.

The morning was resplendent, the sun shone on the surrounding scenery, and burnished with golden lustre the distant panes of the abbey. Theodore's eyes were fixed upon them; Theodore's thoughts took wing, and quick conveyed him to the presence of Juliette. The downy

downy cheek of beauty again glowed with the radiant tint of modesty; the heaving bosom, the averted eye, again whispered the soft confession of long-cherished interest. His hand rested on the little wicket opening to the garden, yet could he not raise the latch; his features were illumined with the apparent smile of recognition, yet was he unconscious of the dame's approach.

"Jesu Maria!" exclaimed the cottager, throwing open the gate, "how unlucky!" Theodore started. "Had you come but ten minutes sooner, you had seen the procession!"

"What procession?" eagerly demanded the youth.

"To be sure," pursued the dame, regardless of the question, "it looked little like a wedding, for the lady Juliette's cheeks,

cheeks, the Virgin bless her! were as white as her bridal garments; and the duke——"

"The lady Juliette!" interrupted the nearly-frantic Theodore; "lead me, direct me to the chapel!" and he grasped the arm of the dame, and hurried her forward.

"Holy saints! are you mad?" struggling; "why, boy, wait till the ceremony is over, and you will see them return. Perhaps——"

"Direct me to the chapel!" again implored Theodore; "my errand is to save her, to snatch her from misery and woe; hesitate, and life and peace are lost! Direct me—Have mercy—The chapel, the chapel!" Theodore gasped for breath; his eyes glared wildly on the dame.

"It is but a little way; be patient; see,

see, the spire peeps amid yon grove of trees."

Theodore heard no more; with one bound he sprang over the paling of the park, and lost sight of his informer. The chapel was situated upon a picturesque island, formed by the conflux of pellucid streams, which watered the domain. Theodore, with tread so agile, that the harebell scarce bent beneath his pressure, crossed the white bridge, and piercing the larch grove, in which the little building was embosomed, rushed up the steps, and pushed open the door. He paused not a moment; but proceeding up the aisle, sprung to the altar, his eyes fixed on the nearly-fainting Juliette, his breast heaving almost to suffocation. Already had the priest unfolded the page, already had the duke de Vermandois seized the hand

hand of his affianced bride—"Forbear! forbear!" exclaimed Theodore; and snatching the sealed paper from his bosom, he held it to Vermandois.

"Proceed!" said the duke, darting on the intruder a mingled glance of contempt and rage; but that glance seemed to awaken some latent recollection, that glance, as the subduing palsy of fear, faded the flushed tint on his cheek, and closed in the start of hasty recognition. He took the paper; he dropped the hand of Juliette; he broke the seal; his eyes ran over the contents; and then, with convulsive rage, his lips quivering, and every limb shaking, he tore it into atoms, and scattered it on the pavement.

Mingled were the sensations which crowded to the hearts, which spoke in the features of the beholders. Joy, gratitude,

tude, flushed the pale cheek of Juliette; while amazement and displeasure rivetted the eyes of the marquis. But Theodore dared not express his feelings, Theodore dared not return even the salutations of the count de Montelioné; he could only hear the faltering accents of Vermandois defer the nuptial ceremony, murmur out "Disappointment, imperious circumstances!" and then casting on Juliette one glance of fond adieu, he fled from the chapel.

In vain the marquis de Lurenville demanded explanation and redress; in vain, with loud and angry threats, he dwelt upon the insult to his honour, and the violation of the promised treaty. Vermandois strove to pacify, yet dared not brave the secret spell upon his actions; he breathed the hope of clearing all the seeming

seeming mystery; and then he sought to take the hand of Juliette; but Montelioné interposing, strengthened the chilling frown of her reluctance, by firmly declaring, until the blackening shade upon his honour was removed, he was his sister's guardian. The marquis, starting from his trance of thought, turned to seek the stranger youth; and then the flight of Theodore was first discovered, and then fresh wonder cramped the powers of exertion.

"Condemn me not," said Vermandois, as returning recollection marked out his tract of action; "I will fly, I will clear this vile aspersion; and when with fame unsullied I return, then be the lady Juliette my recompence."

"Ermissende," articulated Juliette, remembering

remembering the words of the sister Laurette, and steadfastly fixing her eyes on the sallow countenance of the duke.

Not the poisonous asp, which quick destruction threatens, could have produced a start more palsied. The lowering gloom of smothered rage darkened his features; but quick recovering his self-command, he bowed adieu, and quitted the chapel.

Never did the death-doomed prisoner feel in the moment of reprieve a joy more fervent, a gratitude more exalted, than glowed within the breast of Juliette. Led as a victim to the sacrifice, when tears and sighs in vain had pleaded for a father's mercy, in vain confessed the smothered tale of interest for another, she was snatched by that other, by that being

being so beloved, even in the moment of fate, and restored to all the bliss of hope, when its every spring seemed blasted.

Different were the sensations of the marquis; disappointment, rage, mortification, pride, alternately glowed upon his cheek, and checked the powers of action. It was long ere even he remembered the intruder, or sufficiently collected his thoughts to sift the mystery; but even then the effort was ineffectual, for Theodore was nowhere to be found, and the precipitate departure of the duke de Vermandois left all to conjecture. Sternly he silenced the observations of his family; and struggling to assume unshaken confidence, banished the outward appearance of doubt. But the evening closed in new charges and new suspicions; the evening spread a blackening

shadow on Vermandois, which even the powers of prejudice could not dissipate.

Pale, feeble, still suffering under his wounds, the aged Du Plessis passed at the gate of the abbey. His demand was to see the marquis de Lavenville; but when admitted to his presence, agitation and interest took from him the long-conned order of expression, and he could only supplicate exertion in an orphan's cause. It was Vermandois he denounced, it was against Vermandois's power he sought protection, Vermandois, who had torn from him his adopted child, and now, with rage infernal, strove to ensure security by the crime of murder. The marquis started—"Alas! my lord," continued the aged suppliant, "that deadly change from love to hatred stamps the too fatal confirmation of my fears. Ver-

mandois knows that justice is against him. Chance, at the altar's foot, betrayed the birth of Louisine, and overthrew the treasured caution of so many years."

Tranced in amazement, the marquis listened; but when Du Plessis urged e'en nature to espouse the cause of Louisine, he grasped his arm, and quick besought an explanation.

"Louisine," rejoined the agitated Du Plessis, "is the rightful heiress of Vermandois. In the sight of Heaven, I swear Louisine is the daughter of the murdered duke! 'Twas I who saved her —'twas I who snatched her from the upraised steel, and hid her, first with fear, till almost parental love, chasing in injustice, tempted me to veil the story of her wrongs, lest power should deny the claim, and threaten her with danger."

"Eternal powers!" exclaimed the marquis, raising his clasped hands to Heaven; "Louisine—my niece—the providentially-preserved daughter of the murdered Vermandois!—Yes, she shall have justice; my interest, my exertions, shall sift the mystery, and restore her rights!"

Du Plessis sunk upon his knee; he grasped the hand of the marquis, and bathed it with his tears—"As a father, my lord, I thank you," he sobbed, "for as a father have I ever loved her."

"Policy must mark our proceedings," said the marquis, again attentively listening to the recital; "no expression, no unguarded word must betray our cause; still within the convent of Bena Copia our united charge must tarry, till inquiry sifts each circumstance, and justice confirms the decision."

"True,

"True, my lord," replied Du Plessis. "The holy sanctuary of religion is the best, the only asylum for the lady Louisine; in the world, no power could avert the designs of treachery, or guard against the machinations of prosperous vice."

"We will away to Paris," said the marquis, after a pause of reflection; "a few days will calm the exertions of fatigue, and enable you to encounter the undertaking."

Du Plessis sighed; he felt that though age had spared the energies, yet had it frozen the powers of youth. In the cause of the wronged orphan of the ill-fated duke de Vermandois, he felt he could act the hero's part, had not infirmity reminded him man's strength and vigour blooms but once.

CHAP. IV.

There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will. SHAKESPEARE.

.....

The image of a wicked heinous fault
Lives in his eye. SHAKESPEARE.

Mid'st the jarring conflict of passions, Theodore forgot not his promised return to the Castle de Vermandois, forgot not that even love was to yield submissive to duty, forgot not that every obstacle was to sink before the order of Montauban; but for one moment did feeling take the reins; but for one moment did he pause at the feet of the lady Juliette, did he press, with undying fervour, the hand he had redeemed, and then, fearful of taxing fortitude beyond its utmost stretch, he darted down the aisle, and fled

the

the chapel. He feared pursuit—he feared inquiry—he feared ideal trials; nor till distance closed upon the lofty turrets of the abbey, did he feel that fatigue will claim cessation; then he stretched his wearied limbs upon the flower-bespangled carpet, and soon, in magic dreams, shut out the labours of existence. Juliette was the fairy-form which tinged illusive fancy, was the wood-nymph who decked Arcadia, who beckoned on to bliss; and when he awoke, the smile of pure delight glowed on his features.

He started; for the sun, with rapid strides, was stealing from this "nether world;" and though he felt refreshed and armed to meet new toils, yet did he regret the hours of which oblivious sleep had robbed him. Impatient of delay, he pressed forward, and by the moon's pale

beams, pursued his lonely tract. Scarce did the leafy boughs wave in the passing breeze; no sound was stirring, no busy hum of animated nature; deep was the gloom of overhanging craggs, and drear the lone aspect of the wood-crowned mountain. Cheered by the kindly glow of hospitality, within a mud-built hut, Theodore shared the scanty pittance of a goatherd's toil; and stretched upon a bed of sun-dried rushes, awaited but the opening day, which no sooner, dawning from the east, night's humid curtain from the heavens withdrew, than quick arising, he repaid with liberal hand the humble service of his host, and then resumed his journey.

Seldom does time present afford a field for contemplation; it is from the past, or in the facility of anticipation, that man

man exercises the faculties of his mind, and lightens the pang of endurance; the past, stealing from care the busy thoughts, the future, decking with hope delusive scenes of joy, which time may never realize. Theodore revised the hours of infancy, the sports of thoughtless youth, the relaxation from study, the joy of commendation, then quickly passed to the moment of emancipation, nor paused till within the chapel of Bena Copia, till witnessing the profession of the sister Monique. Yes, it was Juliette's soft image which filled the vacuum of his brain—it was love which gilded every opening dawn of fancy, and dipped in bliss the tissue of his future days.

The sun was veiled in clouds; a cold wind blew from the east, and Nature seemed to shrink beneath the blast, when our

hero, descending the rugged steep, pierced the pine forest, and advanced towards the postern of Vermandois. He paused under the battlements; he blew the signal-horn, but the drawbridge was not lowered; solitude and desolation reigned around; and as, a second time, the mountain echoes reverberated the shrill clarion, his heart sank in dire foreboding. The chain rattled; the postern was unbarred; Theodore crossed into the court-yard; then started, with dismay and terror, at the martial guard which barred his passage—"Holy Heaven!" he aspirated; and then all power of inquiry closed in the name of Montauban. Loud was the shout of unfeeling derision, vivid the flush of indignant pride.

"Montauban!" repeated one of the men;

men; "by the mass! should he die under his wounds, he'll be doing more than his young follower, for he'll save the executioner one office."

Theodore tottered; he was sick at heart; all vigour, all animation fled; scorn, disgrace, ignominy, pressed upon his brain, and closed his every prospect. Montauban, his father, led out to death, existence forfeited to outraged law, chained, reviled, condemned; Montauban—and then a heavy groan burst from his labouring bosom; and then amazed, he struggled to escape the sudden pressure of a rude embrace; but in the effort, raised his eyes, and saw the aged, the respected form of father Betsolin. Oh for a limner's art to paint the quick revolving movements of the soul, to note the tear-fraught eye, the enraptured

smile, the quick exchange of sympathetic feeling! Fear, horror, woe, all fled, all yielded to grateful, to uncurbed affection. Theodore, sinking on his knee, clasped the hand of his revered preceptor; nor rose, till rich in a heartfelt benison, he hailed the returning calm of peace. Short was its duration. Montauban, his father, a robber, a murderer, flashed on memory, and numerous were his inquiries for explanation. 'Twas then he learnt, by stratagem surrounded, many of the banditti had, in vain resistance, fallen, and that Montauban, their chief, now lay expiring beneath the anguish of a mortal wound.

"'Tis sad to hear the quick despairing ravings of a guilty mind," observed father Betsolin, "the cries for pardon, and the doubts of grace."

Theodore,

Theodore, in pious appeal, raised his eyes to Heaven; then grasping the cloak of the monk—"Lead me to his couch," he implored, "my instructor, my dear, my early friend! Montauban, the fallen chief of a ruffian band! Montauban is——" He paused irresolute; then, with shuddering horror, concluded—"Montauban is my father!"

"No, no," exultingly exclaimed the monk, "not from a wretch so base are you descended! not in your veins rolls his polluted stream of guilt and shame! Long tried, long suffering, untainted by example, the unmurmuring victim of triumphant sin, you, you, St. Julien!—you, you, the heir, the owner of Vermandois's wealth!—you——" Father Betsolin ceased, for the statue-like gaze of

of Theodore filled him with anxiety and dread.

The youth breathed not, moved not; every power appeared suspended; and when the appeals of apprehension, when the warm tears of friendship thawed the iced feelings of his heart, his first effort was to shrink from the supporting arms of the monk, was to bend his knee, and murmur out his thanks to Heaven, not for his elevation, but for the blessed assurance that vice blackened not the record of a parent's memory; then quickly rising—"Father," he said; "compassion chides delay; let's to the couch of Montauban; your prayers, your sacred function may sooth his dying pangs, whilst I, though not his son, will act a son's last duties."

Changed

Changed was the aspect of the fallen bandit; pride and stern defiance no longer spread dismay, no longer marked his actions: panting, exhausted, Death's fearful train of horrors sat enthroned upon his brow, lengthening his haggard features, and poisoning eternity's dread brink with black and awe-fraught visions. Alas! no inward balm, no self-assurance, gave courage and support:

"For memory, with gall-dipp'd sting,
Brought the past present, and the future trance'd
In doubt."

With feeble effort Montauban's extended hand welcomed our hero; but when he felt the warm pressure of acknowledgment, when he traced the unchecked tear of compassion, he recoiled with sudden horror, and remorse and fear gave colour to his ravings. He talked

ed

ed of murder, appealed for mercy; then waved his hand to stay the spectre monk —"Away! away, pale ghost, away!" he cried; "'tis thou alone canst damn me! No eye beheld the deed, no tongue can tell the story. What if the confessional was stained?—I 'scaped their search. 'Twas murder!—true, true, a brother's murder!—Ermissende!—witch!—enchantress!—devil!" He paused; then with a ghastly smile, resumed—"Know you the signal? Be firm, and spare not. Hah!" again starting, his hands clenched, and his eyes wildly distended, "see, he floats upon a sea of blood!—Hell opens —he drives—he haunts me! What, no mercy?—D'Argenton, no mercy?"

Then rising with violence, as though to precipitate himself from the couch, the effort tore aside the bandage, and his wounds

wounds bled afresh. Long and intermitting faintings succeeded; life feebly ebbed, and not the cheering sounds of pious invocation could rally the flitting spirit. Theodore knelt by his side; father Betsolin, in meek humility, extended the precious ensignia of his faith, and fervently petitioned Heaven to visit with mercy this wretched victim of remorse and guilt.

As day declined, and night's ebon veil enveloped the earth's green bosom, Montauban, with transient strength, regained once more the powers of speech and action: repentance and atonement hung upon his tongue, as his imploring eyes were rivetted on the form of Theodore. Ah! how low was fallen the crest of guilt! how humbled the lordly spirit which once defied subjection! Death, the

the leveller of arrogance and pride, with dart upraised, awaited but the coming hour, to freeze the vital spark, and numb the struggling efforts of repentance.

"What is man?" thought Theodore, as mournfully he gazed upon the expiring bandit—"what his worldly views?—what the painted shadow, expectation? Time——" and then the thread was severed; for then did Montauban, with sudden exclamation, concentrate all his thoughts.

"'Tis from the grave he rises—no force can shut him out—marked you his visage? 'twas pale, and stiff, and cold. I tell you, Randolphe," and he lowered his voice to a whisper, "'twas I who stabbed him, then left the boy, and fled the *confessional of Valombre!* Vermandois too; but what was that?—what a

thousand

thousand lives to his?—the same blood," shuddering—"the same father—the same mother! Oh, Ermissende! Ermissende! my brain was maddened by thy witchery, my feelings marbled, my heart turned to ice!—Ermissende! Ermissende! that deed alone has blasted hope, and barred e'en Heaven against me!"

"Be calm, my son," said father Betsolin; "repentance, not despair, claims the waning moments of existence. Heaven is open to the contrite soul; atonement, confession——"

"I have confessed," eagerly rejoined Montauban; "the black, the heinous list of sin has been laid bare before you. Father, you know my deeds, you know my sin-fraught heart; *atonement* opens not the grave, *atonement* restores not the quivering pulse of life, *atonement* appeases

peases not yon spectre image—Do you not see it?" starting on his elbow, his breast labouring, and his whole form convulsed; "'tis at the door he stands. See! see!" again relapsing into wildness, "D'Argenton throws back his cowl! he opens wide his cloak! see you his shrunken sinews, his fleshless limbs, his rayless sockets? Ah! the worms are busy, they coil around his neck, they harbour in his brain, and now they swell, they grow, they turn to shakes!—He shakes them off!—they drop!—they sting!—they goad me!"

"Eternal Providence!" ejaculated Theodore, bending his knee by the side of the couch, and raising his hands in supplication, "thou, who dost picture hope, and bid the guilty mind repent and live, soften the struggles of a sinner's soul,

soul, calm the dire horrors of his death-bed pangs, and yield some earnest of hereafter mercy!"

Montauban's eyes were fixed upon him; the ray of recollection seemed for a moment to illumine his livid features, and the smile of grateful thanks essayed to stamp expression.

"Vermandois's son, him I have injured! Oh! charity, beneficent and holy——!" He paused, his voice lacked power; death, quick advancing, numbed his limbs, and mocked his feeble efforts.

Theodore sprang to his side; he smoothed his pillow; he bent over him; and the tear, which had long pended from his eye, fell the warm token of sincere forgiveness. Montauban felt that tear, Montauban registered it with the last exertion of strength.

"Not,

"Not, not my son," he faltered; "'twas policy gave birth to subterfuge; I knew the heart, enchained by Nature's claims, would own obedience. Theodore——" He paused—he writhed—he groaned—life's parting struggles convulsed his form, distorted every feature—"Death!—murder!—vengeance!" he wildly breathed—"avaunt, thou dreadful shade!" and then he turned his pleading eyes on father Betsolin; and then he half upraised his clasped, his ice-cold hands—"Ermissende!" again he faltered—"Father!—Heaven!—mercy!" Father Betsolin held to view the cross; he murmured the prayer for pardon: Montauban in vain essayed to grasp it; his hand dropped, the effort was ineffectual: the monk held it to his lips; but no kiss of peace spoke acknowledgment;

the

the vital spark was fled—the deeds of guilt forgotten.

Long was the pause of awful contemplation: Theodore and the monk, alike absorbed in prayer, knelt by the lifeless form; meekness, forgiveness, charity, glowed within their hearts, and silenced every thought of reprehension. Man, born to sin and woe, softened the fiat of condemnation, and virtue deigned to supplicate, e'en in a murderer's cause. Montauban no more, Montauban shrouded in death, fallen the victim of his own enormities, lost to the alleviating balm of repentance, snatched from the benefit of absolution, translated from earth's to Heaven's tribunal, be it for us to trace the growth of sin; for not with him must die the swollen catalogue, whose dark eclipse, set with his own, the brightest hopes

hopes of others; be it for us, in removing the veil of mystery, to solve the spring of his most secret actions.

CHAP. V.

First and ever nearest to my heart
Was this prime duty, so to frame my conduct
Tow'rd *my* father, as were I a father,
My soul would wish to meet with from a son;
And may reproach transmit my name abhorr'd
To latest time, if ever thought was mine
Unjust to filial reverence. MALLET.

.....

Were I crown'd the most imperial monarch,
Thereof most worthy; were I the fairest youth
That ever made eye swerve, had force, and knowledge
More than was ever man's, I would not prize them
Without her love. SHAKESPEARE.

BRIGHT rose the morn which ushered into life the count St. Valery's pride, his hope, his

his heir, his son; sanguine the anticipations of hereafter years, grateful the tribute of thanksgiving. The young Montauban thrived; and nestling on Nature's fostering bosom, greeted, with smiles of soft repayment, a mother's tender cares. Oh, God of o'erruling power! can sin invade a breast so guileless?—can destruction's quickening seeds spring and o'errun a heart, taught, reared in honour? Is it example, or is it man's depravity, is it the gust of passion, or the sport of Fortune, which sways the tide of fate, and blackens oft the page of destiny?

Time, wrapped in pleasure's-stealing trance, fled swiftly on; and the revolving year again began to wane, when to St. Valery's arms a second son was given. Short was the hour of triumph, dear the purchased life; that infant pledge no

mother owned; death sealed her fate, and snatched her from the world, ere interest claimed the sigh of fond endearment. Loud was the plaint of woe, enervating, chilling the languor of despair, which quick succeeded. Months brought no change; the widowed mourner drooped, nor wooed the smile of kindling love, save in the playful gambols of Montauban.

Alas! the little Theodore, the unconscious sealer of a mother's fate, was banished a father's arms, a father's fond protection; complaint closed in injustice, and the lone child was doomed the victim of mistaken prejudice, of unnatural antipathy. Ah! little could the count conceive the virtues he rejected, little read the heart so cruelly severed! Theodore, claimed by compassion, cheered

ed a grandsire's age, and lived to reverence the arms which gave him refuge; lived to return injustice with forgiveness; lived, e'en in distance, to bless, to pray for the near kindred, whom untimely fate had severed.

Not so Montauban; uncurbed, unfettered, hurried away by quick succeeding passions, he broke through all controul, and scoffed at threatened power. In vain St. Valery, awakening from the trance of blind indulgence, urged and implored; in vain he claimed the aid of reason, and the sway of feeling; reason had foundered in the rushing torrent of intemperance, and feeling owned no influence in a parent's cause. Leagued with a train, unprincipled and vicious, buoyed by the glare of promised splendour, and spurred by loud bravado to

acts of shameless daring, Montauban, profaning the sacred purity of religion in a borrowed garb, dared e'en the threatened fury of the church, and from the altar sought to tear a newly-initiated member. Thwarted, discovered, disgrace and ruin pending, he fled the paternal roof, and left his father writhing under the festering pangs of ingratitude and disappointment. 'Twas then, as a cheering sun, shone the contrasting virtues of the banished Theodore; 'twas then, organized in principle, he quitted the princely domain of his grandsire, the count D'Argenton, on the mission of duty and philanthropy, to heal the bleeding sorrows of St. Valery's heart.

Torturing was the pang of self-reproach, distracting the reflection of past injustice; in shame the drooping parent

hung

hung his head, in shame he quick revived the fatal force of prejudice; and though his pallid cheek flashed the faint glow of feeling, though his limbs trembled with the subduing struggles of agitation and affection, yet was he silent.

"Forgive me — receive me — take me to your bosom," implored the kneeling Theodore; "my father, forego this too severe chastisement—exile me no longer.—Ah! deign with an eye of pity to behold your son, who prays, who sues but for your favour!" St. Valery could only weep. "Let Nature claim her empire," pursued the youth.

"Nature!" interrupted the count, in all the agony of woe; "Nature has revenged her own cause—Montauban, my first-born, Montauban has disgraced me!"

Theodore's tears flowed with his father's

—Theodore's arms were clasped around him; yet did no struggle betray dissatisfaction—"I would sooth, I would comfort you," murmured the youth. "Father, your blessing; give me your blessing, and my life, my existence, my unceasing, my eternal efforts, shall be to lighten your affliction."

"All-seeing Power!" exclaimed St. Valery, "how frail, how erroneous is human judgment! My heart, the slave of prejudice, nurtured the serpent of its own undoing; now stung, now goaded, drooping and betrayed, the banished, the neglected claimant on its affection, flies to relieve its cares. My son, my kind, forgiving Theodore!"

The youth sank upon his knees; his head bowed to the gracious benison; and he arose, rich in the gift for which his soul

soul had often pined. But though the count repaid with smiles the studied efforts of his son, though, struggling with his internal feelings, he strove to blot from recollection all the trials, all the sorrows of the past, still tenderness, recalling the absent image of Montauban, scoffed at his efforts, and mocked his just resolves. He drooped in secret; care's subtle worm gnawed on his heart, corroding all his powers, and banqueting on energy and health. It is not a day, a week, a month, which shows the deep effect of sorrow; it is not the features, or the words, which speaks what acts within: alas! as the smothered flame burns fiercest, so does the cherished woe, admitting not the flow of confidence, subdue the vigour, and sap the springs of life.

Six months had scarcely registered the

persevering tenderness of Theodore, the undutiful neglect of Montauban, ere St. Valery lost every sense of sorrow in the grave, when, through the medium of a broken heart, anguish and care alike had ceased to torture; and all his rich possessions, his honours, and his title, descended to the worthless author of his doom.

Drooping with despondence, mourning a parent so lately found, Theodore quitted the chateau, and hastened to regain the home where gratitude and love were centered. Brilliant was the dying ray which lingered in the west, as his eager eyes descried the spiral turrets of his grandsire's vast domain; vivid the glow which tinged his cheek, as already folded in the warm embrace, fancy breathed forth the gladdening sounds of welcome. Unhappy Theodore! life teems

teems with ills, and reason and religion were designed to smooth the thorny way. Heedless, unsuspecting man, sees not the gathering storm which blackens oft his fortune. The hour of fate drew nigh; heretofore, life had passed in smooth unchequered scenes; heretofore, the heart untouched, had known no care beyond the slight of kindness. Love had ne'er awakened the festering pang of woe, nor tinged with glowing hope the sigh of fond emotion. Piercing the little copse which fringed the margin of a rippling stream, he heard a voice exclaim—"Fie, Ermissende! dissatisfied, ungrateful, you pine for wealth and power!"

"No, no, good mother, I pine to see some being like ourselves. Better become a nun, than live thus secluded."

"Ah, child!" with a heavy sigh,

"when, like me, you have felt misfortune, when, like me, you have outlived expectation, then will you shrink from the world, and all its fallacious promises."

Ermissende, playing with the wild rose she had plucked, archly observed—"One grain of experience o'erbalances a whole page of precept." And then she paused; and then her cheeks mocked the rich tints of the leaves she scattered, for her sloe-black eyes encountered the form of Theodore.

He had heard of beauty, he had seen beauty decked in the rich attire of courtly splendour; but never, never had he seen a form so fascinating, a face so faultless. Not the bright queen of love could boast more dazzling charms than Ermissende; youth was in her steps, and gaiety and pleasure hovered round her. Her bonnet

bonnet hung upon her arm, and her snow-white hand was raised to part the glossy ringlets of her ebon hair. Theodore moved slowly on; but though distance closed upon the beauteous vision, still did his heart, fresh strung, fresh nerved in interest, recall the past. He reached his grandsire's castle; he felt, he returned the warm embrace of fond affection; he heard the enumerated occurrences which had transpired in absence; and recited the death, the sorrows of his buried father; yet did the calm, which once had marked his hours, return no more. At night his dreams recalled the peerless form of Ermissende; and ever in his rambles did his steps point to the romantic copse in which he had beheld her; but she came not: anxiety succeeded; every thought, every hope

 yielded

yielded to the pleasing fantasy; and though the passing glance had lingered but a moment, yet was he gone in love an age.

A week elapsed, when Theodore, pacing the flowery border of the stream, smiling at his own infatuation, and vainly striving to recall the wished-for calm of blank indifference, discovered, in a sudden turning, a picturesque cottage, sheltered from the rough blasts of the north by an o'erhanging mountain. Shagged were its sides, and to its scowling precipice hung hardy shrubs of many a winter's growth. Theodore paused involuntarily; the romantic outline of the picture, slumbering in undisturbed repose, attracted his attention. A white bridge, thrown across the stream, led to the trellis-bounded garden which surrounded

rounded the cottage. He crossed it. The beauteous object of his solicitude reigned, in imagination, the goddess of the Arcadia; and not till he reached the low wicket, opening into the garden, did he reflect on the absurdity of his conclusion—"Whither am I hurrying? and under what plea would I intrude myself?" he mentally questioned; and then, disconcerted, timid, he again crossed the bridge. But as he paused on the opposite side, as he leant against a willow, whose weeping branches kissed the flood, he beheld the lovely Ermissende steering a little boat down the stream: what were his feelings, what were his transports, when anchoring near the spot on which he stood, she shrunk not from his extended hand, but suffered him to moor her

her bark to the tough branches of the willow!

"You must advance no further," said Ermissende, smiling, and pausing at the foot of the bridge—"Father Philippe will give me a penitentiary if he sees me talking to a stranger."

"A stranger!" repeated Theodore; "I would be a friend, sweet Ermissende!"

The maiden blushed; a frolic smile played on her coral lips, as archly she replied—"We have met but once before, and then we spoke not."

"Ah, have you too recalled that meeting?" eagerly questioned the youth, thrown off his guard, and snatching the white hand of Ermissende; "have you too recalled that meeting?"

"I shall have reason to remember *this*," was

was the response; and then she struggled to withdraw her hand; and then, in a voice of terror, she concluded—"If my aunt, if old Dorothée, or father Philippe sees you, I shall never again be able to ramble alone."

"Then you sometimes ramble alone beyond the cottage boundary?" said Theodore. Ermissende was silent. "Ah, cruel girl!" continued the youth, "why have you never again visited the thicket?"

"Because," hesitatingly articulated Ermissende, "because my aunt would not suffer me. We had met a human being there, and that was enough to interdict the spot."

"Alas!" asked Theodore, "has your aunt, under the blank impression of misfortune, renounced all social intercourse? and would she selfishly hide you from

from a world you were born to ornament?"

Ermissende's cheek flushed the bright tint of exultation, and her eyes beamed with new-fraught ardour, as she exclaimed—"She would indeed bury me in this desert; and when I murmur, she calls me dissatisfied and ungrateful."

Love blinded the eyes, love steeped the senses of Theodore, or reason would have bid him shun the siren, reason would have whispered her at best unguarded; but no, simplicity, innocence were assigned, artifice unguessed at. Her mind, he thought, spurned at suspicion; and self-love whispered the possibility of having excited an interest in her heart —"Heaven knows," mused Theodore, as his eyes rested on her faultless features, "if on earth exists the powers of sympathy,

sympathy, if Nature admits the secret impulse of the soul, no other being hast thou pictured."

"Farewell," said Ermissende: "'tis true, you are a stranger; but yet——" and she extended her hand.

Theodore snatched it—Theodore raised it to his lips—"We shall meet again," he fearfully articulated. Ermissende smiled—"Ah! tell me," he implored, "tell me we shall meet again."

"We are both young," archly replied Ermissende, "and life holds forth long years of promise."

"Stay! stay!" eagerly exclaimed Theodore, checking her effort to fly; "be gracious, be merciful; tell me the hour, tell me when and where you ramble?"

"Immediately after the vesper service,"

vice," said Ermissende, "for then father Philippe is in his study, and my aunt fast asleep."

"To the thicket?" again demanded Theodore.

"No, no, up the shaggy side of yon mountain," answered Ermissende; and snatching away her hand, she hurried through the garden.

Theodore watched her receding figure: light, sylphid were her movements; and when she reached the little portico, she waved her veil. Alas! though he beheld her no more, yet was every expression registered: love had established an empire in his heart; and Ermissende had seized the reins of action. Not for a moment did he suspect her of design, not for a moment did he accuse her of imprudence; innocence explained her

playful

playful vivacity, and her suavity and candour were attributed to inexperience.

Theodore returned to the chateau; but impatience marked the flight of time; his pursuits, his employments ceased to interest; and ever at the vesper hour did he steal from his grandsire's presence. Love raged despotic, love coloured the bursting sigh, love tinged his hopes, his thoughts, his wishes.

Ermissende, true to appointment, exulting in the power of her charms, eager to enchain the devoted heart of the count D'Argenton's heir, ever at the close of the calm office of devotion, wandered from the cottage, and with the light graces of a hamadryad, ascending the delving steeps of the mountain, exchanged the deep and sonorous counsels of father Philippe, for the entrancing whispers of first-awakened

awakened passion. Ah! how swiftly fled the halcyon moments! how did the calm serenity of the soul extend, and spread o'er all created nature the magic colouring of delight! Each romantic dell smiled an Arcadia, and every shrub, and every flower, glowing in more vivid tints, imbued with new-fraught sweetness the passing gale.

"Ah! why," sighed Theodore, as he listened to the unvarnished tale of Ermissende's humble fortune, "why did not Nature place me in the self-same sphere?" Ermissende's playful smile vanished, and instantly her features wore the cast of thought—"How blest that lot," pursued her lover, unmindful of the change, "which owns no influence from unsocial state, nor seeks for happiness, in pride and empty grandeur. To live upon this mountain,

mountain to reap ourselves the bountiful gifts of Nature, and to receive in Love's soft smile the rich reward of our exertions, what more of bliss can fancy picture? say, lovely Ermissende, does not the reward repay the sacrifice?"

Faint was the *yes* which lingered on the lips of Ermissende; for ah! that acquiescence sprang not from the heart; that grandeur so despised, was the chief lure which guised, in pretended interest, the wily hopes of mad ambition. Though bred in ignorance of the world's allurements, though taught to seek for happiness in mediocrity, yet had fancy oft pierced the interdicted limits, and rioted in vain forbidden joys.

Weeks wore away; yet Theodore, though dwelling on the fair prospect of bliss, spoke not of the altar's sanction. Ermissende

Ermissende felt perplexed, uneasy; she knew the title and the rich possessions of the count D'Argenton descended to his favoured grandson; and she pined to realize the scenes of splendour which sleep's sanguine visions each night had traced. A thousand expedients, a thousand artful projects, filled the brain of the politic beauty, to alarm his love, and to ensure success, for well she read the heart she sought to lure.

Theodore, as usual, repaired to the appointed rendezvous; but Ermissende came not. The sun sank, and the shadows of twilight mingled the distant outline; yet was he dejected and alone. In vain he looked towards the cottage which contained his treasure, in vain he paced the path, and listened to each passing sound. A thousand fears assailed

ed him, a thousand improbabilities which pregnant fancy realized; and not till every hope closed in the rapid strides of night, did he descend the steep. He lingered on the bridge; and anxiety and affection led him through the garden, and to the very door of the cottage; yet did he fear to knock—for whom could he inquire, and how could he explain the intrusion? As he stood irresolute, a light flashed from an upper casement, and the next moment he distinguished the angel form of Ermissende. His heart throbbed, his respiration quickened; softly he breathed her name; and then he plucked a rose, and hurled it at the window.

She heard the signal; her heart exulted in the completion of her project; and

and with a start of well-feigned fear, she opened wide the lattice.

"Since sunset I have paced yon mountain," whispered Theodore. "Unkind Ermissende, to trifle with a heart, which knows no peace in absence!"

"Alas!" murmured the wily girl, "my aunt has discovered our meetings, and I dare not brave her anger. She has told me——" and then she paused; and then, with fearful caution, softly resumed —"You must fly—you must leave me; if——"

"No never, never!" eagerly interrupted Theodore.

"Speak softly," implored Ermissende: "think, should our voices betray us."

"I care not!" exclaimed the impetuous Theodore. "To the world will I declare

declare the ardour of a passion, which knows no bounds."

"Affection harbours a thousand fears," artfully observed the siren; "your rank, your situation—ah! think, my lord, if I was rich, if I was nobly born;" and again she hesitated; then quickly added—"Fly, fly, my aunt is on the stairs."

Theodore, in all the rhetoric of love, implored an interview, implored her to join him in the garden; and Ermissende, half reluctant, half consenting, at length closed the casement, and stole from the cottage. With bashful diffidence she listened to the fond effusions of her lover; and ere they parted, every doubt was hushed, and every sorrow slumbered.

Theodore hung on her smile enraptured; and as he snatched her to his bosom, as he listened to her murmuring

fears; he placed a brilliant ring upon her finger, and leading her towards the cottage, fervently exclaimed—"Be this the pledge of my devotion—Ermissende, my Ermissende, be it the talisman which binds our hearts!"

In the morning, without reserve, Theodore related to his indulgent parent the rise and progress of his passion; in vivid colours he panegyrized the charms of Ermissende—"Poverty is her only fault," he said, anxiously pressing the hand of the count—"ah, my father, not innocence and virtue are more spotless than is her angel mind!"

The count shook his head; the expression of his features varied; and from the calm of content, assumed the thoughtful gloom of anxiety and doubt.

Theodore shuddered, Theodore sank at his

his feet; love gave him eloquence; and in all the energy, in all the enthusiasm of his feelings, he pleaded for his consent; he pleaded for his blessing—"I must see this little siren," said the count, forcing a smile: "love often blinds the eyes, and misleads the judgment. If fortune be the only barrier, we have enough for both."

Theodore, subdued, struggling with the tide of feeling, in vain strove to express his gratitude; but the count checked his every effort; and then attentively listened to the outline of her story. Theodore's eyes beamed with joy—Theodore became an orator; he dwelt on the orphaned infancy of Ermissende, and pictured, with faltering agitation, the maternal solicitude of her aunt, who, stemming the torrent of misfortune, the pres-

sure of poverty, had reared her in the pure, the matchless track of virtue.

From this period, harmony and peace harboured in the breast of Theodore; every fear was banished, every obstacle removed; the cottage door flew open at his approach; and Ermissende was all his youthful hopes could fancy. But mark the instability of bliss, mark the fleeting reign of man's felicity:—the day, the hour was fixed; Fate seemed to smile upon the promised union, and Love himself, on burnished wing, lighted the radiant torch of Hymen.

Brilliant were the hopes of ambition—almost realized, almost enjoyed, the adulations of praise, the gratifications of vanity. Love swayed not the mind of Ermissende; it was birth, it was title, which had purchased the smile of her favour.

Entranced

Entranced in the blaze of splendour, often, when alone, decking her raven locks with the starry gems which affection had fondly presented, lingering o'er the delusions of title and of wealth, would she anticipate the homage which the world would offer to her matchless charms.

All was hilarity and joy at the chateau, when the week previous to the intended nuptials, pleasure yielded to anxiety, expectation to mourning. The count D'Argenton, the exemplary, the kind, the indulgent friend of the grateful Theodore, drooped, sickened, and, in the hour destined to have given the blushing Ermissende to his arms, died. Drear was the contrast 'twixt the splendour of bridal vestments, and the sable habiliments of the grave; every countenance wore the stamp of sorrow, for every heart

mourned the loss of a benefactor; the rich moistened the turf with the tears of regret; the poor bedewed it with the soft effusions of gratitude. But bitter were the sighs, bitter were the regrets of Ermissende. Theodore traced not their real source; it was to sensibility, to interest, to affection, he attributed the lamentations of her grief, and that conclusion linked with double force the strong claims of tenderness. He dreamt not that disappointed ambition, that the protracted visions of greatness alone dimmed the lustre of her radiant eyes; for alas, what is so easily blinded as self-love? what spell is half so delusive as the spell of passion?

Time softened the first burst of sorrow—time lightened the poignancy of woe; the period of mourning wore

awa /

away; and Theodore, count D'Argenton, revived the theme of his former hopes. Ermissende smiled, and the pang of past affliction was forgotten. The nuptial morn was again named; and Fate, more lenient, called up no second storm to blight its promise. The chateau's calm retirement quick became exchanged for the gay scenes and splendid feats of Paris; and Ermissende, the worshipped bride of D'Argenton, became the star of fashion, and the spur of envy. A thousand charms, a thousand fancied joys allured her: thurst as it were upon a new theatre of action, her youth, her vanity, alike assailed, alike assailing, possessing attractions to tempt a stoic's gaze, and no stronger shield than gratitude to guard her feelings, she yielded unresisting to the siren-voice of pleasure; and

while the count, high in royal favour, attended the cabinet of state, plunged in the giddy vortex of joyless dissipation.

CHAP. VI.

Who should be trusted, when one's own right hand
Is perjur'd to the bosom?
I must never trust more;
But count the world a stranger for thy sake.
The private wound is deepest. SHAKESPEARE.

THOUGH ungracious be the theme, yet consistency commands us to unveil the secret spring of vice, and from the splendid scenes of Paris, to pursue the flying track of Montauban's desertion. Discovered in the act of violating the sacred sanctuary of religion, of tearing a member from the church, of luring a nun to

profane

profane the solemn vow of inauguration, he fled the paternal roof, leaving the hapless victim of his passion to stem alone the gathering storm of monachal severity. She was arraigned, she was condemned, she was entombed in the den of penance; and though compassion shed the silent tears, mercy no more unclosed the bars. But Montauban?—true, we pass over the rigid fiat which stamped the lapse of virtue, and pierce with him the courted haunts of vice. Dead to a parent's woes, unmindful but of self-preservation, lost to all sense both moral and divine, banishing past disappointments in new intrigues, he fled to Marseilles, and there resumed the mad career of falsely-denominated pleasure.

It was at the bastide of a nobleman, whither gaiety and dissipation had assem-

bled a numerous company, that a similarity of disposition, and a native coincidence of taste, forged between Montauban and the count de Montbelliard, the first link of intimacy. The count was born of an illustrious family; but his finances were confined, his expectations limited; for fortune, in an elder brother, had given an heir to his father, the duke de Vermandois's wealth. A slave to his passions, rioting in all the licentious profligacy of vice, owning no sway but inclination, and ever acting under the influence of his fickle fancy, he courted the society of Montauban, because he found his fortune necessary to his embarrassments; and gradually becoming mutually entrusted, and mutually instrumental to each other's secret vices, they became, as is frequently the case, through the

the bonds of licentiousness, alike fearful of the power they had invested. Such were the gradual strides of Montauban's vicious propensities, when the death of an indulgent father gave a momentary check to his pursuits. But transient was the gloom of sorrow; the taunt of ridicule chased the bitter tear; and ere the grave had closed upon his heart-broken parent, he secretly exulted in the fiat which gave to his hands the free uncurbed controul of a splendid inheritance. Leagued with his sworn associate, they quitted Marseilles, and without any aim, save the love of change, traversed most of the extensive provinces of their native country.

It was towards the close of autumn, when Nature, disrobed of her gay attire, exchanges all her budding verdure for

the drear and barren garb of winter, that the friends, panting for a new career, plunged in all the gay excesses which the corrupted capital afforded. But while the count de Montbelliard is studying at the gaming-table to repair his ruined fortune, be it our task alone to trace the new and destructive passion which kindled in the unprincipled breast of Montauban.

It was on the third night after his arrival at Paris, that in the gay circle at the opera, his eyes were dazzled by a being, whose youth and whose beauty rivalled the artist's most exuberant flights. The performance was unnoticed; not for one moment was his attention withdrawn; he saw the lovely stranger quit the box, and then he flew to watch her movements; but he was too late; ere

he

he had gained the door of entrance, the carriage had driven off, and he stood for several moments totally absorbed. Never once did fancy lose sight of the features which had fascinated him, never cease to linger o'er the perfections of the unknown. With unabating perseverance he frequented every public haunt; and because disappointment tended his exertions, his mind became a prey to inquietude. Never before had his heart participated in the casual start of passion, never registered the power of beauty, or bowed to the strength of prepossession; but now every opposing effort was ineffectual; and like a lion in the toil, the more he struggled for freedom, the more was he insnared. Even the pointed shafts of ridicule became blunted, and absorbed in one darling

pursuit,

pursuit, he heeded not the innuendoes of his friend. Through a parent's early prejudices, it may be remembered the links of fraternal affection were severed; nay, that Montauban and Theodore were reared as strangers to each other; it cannot then be surprising that Montauban should hear the name of D'Argenton without emotion, and that he should breathe the same air, that he should reside in the same capital, without once seeking an interview.

The count D'Argenton, rich in the regard, in the friendship of his sovereign, actuated by different principles, and swayed by different motives, shrunk ever from the haunts of depraved taste; and save in the public circle, where chance mingled the promiscuous throng, the brothers never met.

It

It was in the morning of All-souls day, as Montauban, almost despairing of ere again beholding the fair object of his ceaseless pursuit, was passing the cathedral of Notre Dame, that he lost sight of a female at its entrance, whose sylphid movements, and whose majestic form thrilled like electricity on his feelings. Fancy pictured none other than the stranger; and with a sudden bound he sprung up the steps, and entered the choir. How omnipotent is the sway of love! it bent even the knee of Montauban, and led him, if not to worship, at least to join, with seeming sanctity, in the outward forms of worship; but though his lips murmured the response, his eyes were rivetted on the lovely instigator of his devotion. A thousand times more captivating did she appear, than when,

reaping

reaping fresh lustre from external ornaments, she shone in the blaze of splendour: no gems confined the dark fillets of her hair; but though a lawn of gossamer thinness veiled her features, yet did her lips vie with the ruby of Guzzerat, and her eyes with the matchless brilliants of Brazil. Vivid was the tint which flushed her cheek as she encountered the steadfast gaze of Montauban; but when, taking the arm of her companion, she proceeded down the aisle, when, with eager haste, he followed her footsteps, a smile of exulting pride, of gratified vanity, marked the expression of her countenance; that smile fanned on to the pursuit; that smile extended the ready hand to aid her in her descent from the cathedral; and then the sun's meridian brightness, dancing on the undulating

waves

waves of the Seine, gave room for observation. Montauban lost not the opportunity; he attended the beautiful stranger to the gate of a superb hotel; and when he lost sight of her, when, with a fascinating smile, she bowed an acknowledgment of his attention, when, with eager anxiety, he questioned a casual passer, and heard pronounced the count D'Argenton, horror thrilled his heart, and iced every faculty of his nature. For many moments he stood tranced in thought, irresolute whether to fly the Circe, or court at once the poison: but what could oppose the mad, the giddy hopes of Montauban? what could daunt a mind so daring? what could subdue a passion so excited? He smiled at the lapse of resolution, at the short-lived struggle of principle; and with a heart

dead

dead to nature and to feeling, he sought admission, and under a brother's cloak, stole into a brother's confidence.

Montauban was handsome; the easy polish of the world had given grace to his tall athletic form; and his smile was the smile of seduction. Ermissende shrunk not from his attentions; nay, when he envied a brother's bliss, she started not in terror; when the burning sigh of unhallowed passion betrayed the agitation of his heart, hers re-echoed that sigh, hers alike breathed the plaint of dissatisfaction.—But not to pollute our page with the fatal gradations of ingratitude and sin, not to shock the mind of delicacy with a record of black, of almost matchless horror, we will hasten to the period, when, like the blast of fate, confirmation trod on the heels of suspicion, when the frenzied

frenzied D'Argenton cursed a brother in the seducer of a wife, and sought in vain to trace the hidden track of the fugitives.

Long lost to every influence but rage, panting, dying for vengeance, D'Argenton, combating the fell power of disease, rallied every principle of exertion, and prosecuted a search which closed but in disappointment. Dispirited, heart-broken, every faculty of his mind impaired, no stimulus of action, no fallacious ray of promised hope, the wretched D'Argenton yielded the strife of nature, and sank subdued by misery and woe. In vain the studied efforts of friendship were essayed; in vain, borne on the wings of compassion, the duke de Vermandois sought the couch of the sufferer, sought to allay the pent-up sigh. Memory was harrowing: in the starts of delirium,

lirium, Ermissende, the guilty Ermissende, was cursed; in the casual calm of sanity, Heaven was petitioned for her conversion. Restored to health, when death was eagerly courted, his mind partook not of the body's convalescence; and from the social haunts of men, he shrunk in moody melancholy. Wrapped in his own peculiar cares, viewing with misanthropic eye the world's fallacious colourings, no more he mingled in its gay pursuits, no more the brilliant circle of a court allured him. Man alike was treacherous—woman alike false; and quitting Paris, he fled to his retirement in Gascony. But there, alas! he found no alleviating balm, no care-stealing oblivion; each copse, each rural glen, recalled the past; for memory, "like a deadly swarm of hornets arm'd," pictured

tured the hours of infant love, and poisoned all hope of peace in the drear contrast. The mountain ramble, the tree-embosomed cottage, all, all harboured the form of Ermissende, and wring the bitter tears of misery.

'Twas in these warring conflicts of the soul, that Religion smiled a beckoning pilot to meek-eyed Content: blest was the inspiration, sanguine the eager votarist. No claim wedded him to the world; every claim was severed, save the claim of the duke de Vermandois's friendship, and gratitude whispered him a debtor for past interest. He wrote, he explained the motive of his conduct; and then bidding an eternal adieu to every external object, he fled, and sought the shelter of Valombre's monastery. There, soon after his assumption of the cowl,

death

death having removed the father superior, the exertions of interest inaugurated him in the pious office of abbot of the fraternity. Absorbed in the duties of his station, carefully banishing the rugged roads of thought, and living but in the anticipation of the future, he studied ever to promote the happiness of his order; and though he lost not the saddened cast which calamity had stamped upon his features, still in the performance of his religious duties, in the calm communion of soul, in the patient endurance of restrictions, he prayed even for the destroyer of his repose; nay, Ermlsende was recalled with pity: but no longer did the thrill of tenderness agitate his emaciated form, no longer did it flush with animating scarlet the sallow hue of his care-worn countenance. At

the

the altar of devotion, with a heart contrite and subdued, he mingled each appeal with grateful thanksgiving to Heaven, for having, in escaping the snares and temptations of the world, learned the true estimate of man's boasted superiority.

CHAP. VII.

Lust and liberty
Creep in their minds;
That 'gainst the stream of virtue they may strive,
And drawn themselves in riot. SHAKESPEARE.

.....

Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time,
Ere human statute purg'd the gen'ral weal;
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
Too terrible for the ear. SHAKESPEARE.

Alas! what a contrast to the pious offices of christianity, what a contrast to the unvaried

unvaried calm which marked the waning years of St. Theodore's existence, did the vitiated career of guilt portray! Ermissende—but we must progressively detail the gradations of vice, and start from the moment, when dead alike to gratitude, to honour, and to virtue, yielding to the incitements of unhallowed passion, she fled a husband's sanctuary, and braved the sneer of scorn, the keen, the scorpion sting of conscience, to share the fortune of that husband's brother. In a heart depraved, feeble are the struggles of duty, faint the resistance 'gainst the combined attacks of importunity and inclination. Ermissende heard the soft sigh, marked the stolen glance, felt the tremulous indication of growing conquering interest; yet yielding to the fatal, the insnaring weakness, vanity, did she fan the

flame

flame of prepossession. Studied were the graces of external ornament—alluring the smile of soft encouragement. Montauban extolled her matchless form, dwelt on the lustre of her radiant eyes, swore that her lips outvied the ruby's redness, that the lily's downy bell hung drooping at her bosom's rivalry, that with a tint, more vivid than the rose, Nature had tinged her cheek, and that the jetty raven owned no plumage half so black as the luxuriant ringlets of her glossy hair! Ermissende listened—Ermissende was entranced; she reflected not that her heart too fondly viewed the tempter; nor when the mask of soft persuasion dropped, did she shrink from the snare concealed. Montauban was pitied, was loved; and each revolving moment, giv-

ing strength to importunity, weakened the feeble remnant of resistance. No suspicion marked the flagrant strides of passion, for no fear was guessed at: a brother's rights, a bar of adamant, was as the guard of honour; and D'Argenton was safe, because the soul was judged by the pure standard of his own untainted principles. Not so the eye of friendship, not so the quick, the discriminating glance of disinterested regard; the duchess de Vermandois read and shuddered at the guilty secret; carefully she veiled her guessed-at knowledge, save from the ear of Ermissende, and her, with soft and gentle admonitions, she strove to arm against the traitor's wiles. But ah, how vain each effort! Ill-stifled rage dyed the flushed cheek of beauty; and Ermissende,

sende, the guilty, the ungrateful recreant to her vows, fled, in the open face of shame and blackening censure.

Rich in the double prize of mistress and of friend, Montauban quitted Paris; France could yield no safety from a brother's vengeance; and fear giving wings to speed, the leagued triumvirate in guilt, for the count de Montbelliard clung to the scattered remnant of Montauban's fortune, crossed the Alpine boundary, and hastened to Strasburgh. There, unknown, unsuspected, they gleaned the rich harvest of credulity; and proceeding onwards to Vienna, living on the guileless and unwary, sojourning but to allure and to defraud, they ranged from kingdom to kingdom; and at the expiration of two years, without credit, without resources, they again arrived in France.

Montauban, goaded by the murmuring complaints of Ermissende, upon whom he still madly doated, and trembling lest the lure of splendour should tempt her to forswear and to desert him, with jealous caution sought to hide her from admiring eyes. He knew himself a bankrupt in Fortune's favour, and he knew the heart he strove to chain panted again to riot in her luxuries—"We cannot live in indigence," said Montauban, in reply to the various projects which the fertile fancy of Montbelliard devised; "some resource must be ours."

"Ermissende has beauty," observed Montbelliard.

Montauban's hand grasped the hilt of his sword—"Not to dive amidst the earth's embowelled treasures," he exclaimed, "not to own the richest gems of

of Peru, would I yield her to another! Ermissende is my fate. Mark me, Montbelliard, 'tis her distresses which make me desperate!"

"There is no hope from D'Argenton," said the count; "his rich possessions, with himself, are invested in Valombre's monastery."

"Vermandois is no monk," said Montauban, musing.

Montbelliard started — Montbelliard's eyes flashed fire—"Vermandois, my brother, rich, great, powerful;" and then a smile of deep and deadly import distorted his features.

"Fly to him," rejoined Montauban, "and own at once the secret of your embarrassment."

"What, bend my knee," asked Montbelliard, "and sue for favour?—No, never:

ver: and yet——" He folded his arms in deep abstraction; then suddenly starting—"Let us fly into Gascony," he pursued: "in the Pyrenees, in the lone domain of Vermandois, my brother tarries; I will visit, I will——" Again he hesitated—"Montauban," and he lowered his voice to a whisper, "Ermissende, your Ermissende shall live in splendour.—Will you not aid me?"

"Yes, with my life," eagerly replied Montauban.

"Keep that for Ermissende," artfully rejoined Montbelliard; "'tis but your courage I would claim."

"Point out the track; my courage will not fail, though danger, death, nay, hell should threaten!"

The hand of Montbelliard was quick extended; in sworn amity he grasped Montauban's,

Montauban's, as emphatically he pronounced—"Be ours one cause—one hope—one fortune!"

"But why to Gascony?" demanded Montauban, unable to solve the secret of his movements.

"Short will be our banishment," answered Montbelliard.—"Here in safety may Ermissende await us——"

"Here!" interrupted the alarmed Montauban; "first tear my heart, freeze up the genial current of existence, ere bid me part from Ermissende!"

"You are still a lover," ironically remarked Montbelliard.

Montauban viewed him with suspicious caution, as he exclaimed—"Unfold the scheme, or I renounce all interest."

"Be Ermissende the partner of our journey," quickly resumed Montbelliard.

"Your doubts belie our friendship; banish them as unworthy our sworn confederacy."

Montauban was appeased: but when he traced the tear of soft complaint pending on the downy cheek of Ermissende, again his fears, his feelings pictured a thousand dreads, augured a thousand improbabilities—"Why do you weep?" he tenderly inquired. Ermissende replied not; but she held in her hand the casket which had once contained her jewels, and which embarrassment had now despoiled—"Gems more precious shall yet adorn that bosom," continued Montauban: "fear not, Ermissende, Fortune will yet smile."

"Not in this solitude," she despondingly said; and then she threw back the lid of the casket; and then a quickening blush

blush glowed upon her cheek, for the brilliant ring, the pledge of early truth, the gift of the confiding D'Argenton, acting as a basilisk, rivetted her attention.

Montauban traced the varying expression of her features: he took the ring; and as he listened to its first award, he placed it on his finger—"Be it," he exclaimed, "the firm cement, the powerful talisman of our affection! Ermissende, nought but your estrangement shall tear it hence."

The last gem was removed from the casket, yet Ermissende smiled; she saw it sparkle on the finger of her betrayer; yet did no pang of regret, no lingering indication of remorse, poison her quiet. St. Theodore in his monastic cell was ne'er recalled; for hope, confidence, expectation, all centered in Montauban.

Elated by a new project, acting under the guidance of Montbelliard's decision, the guilty pair quitted the retreat they had chosen, and hastened into Gascony. The day was closing as they mounted the ridgy passes of the Pyrenees, and evening's "sober grey" mingled each gigantic outline, when pausing at the delving base of the mountain, they hesitated whether to pierce the lonely defile which spread itself before them. Ermissende trembled, for the prospect was desolate; black was the gloom of the thickly-dotted pines, and awe-inspiring the o'erhanging craggs.

"We have nothing to lose," whispered Montauban, in reply to the timid apprehensions of his companion.

"Is it you to say so?" artfully interrogated

rogated Ermissende, summoning the deceptive smile of soft allurement.

"Nought that man can wrest from me," replied the exulting Montauban.

Ermissende's sigh was doubtful.

"We have nought to fear," said Montbelliard, who had singly reconnoitred the defile; "we may advance with safety; the grave is not more undisturbed."

"But when there?" demanded the still-reluctant Ermissende; "which is our course to pursue?"

"We must seek cover beneath some sheltering crag," said Montauban, "and wait till morning lights us onward."

Ermissende yielded her hand, though her heart felt unassured; and when the overpending steeps, when the intersecting pines deepened their shadowy path,

she started, as though o'erwhelming danger threatened.

"How little do these woman's fears accord with former resolution!" softly observed Montauban.

Though unmeant, Ermissende felt the reproach; her spirit and her pride alike assailed, darted the electric flash of fire; and with a glance of cold disdain, she was about to breathe retort, when from an ambushed shelter, a rude banditti rushed, and stopped their progress. Vain was the rash expedient of resistance; Montauban was o'erpowered; disarmed, wounded, his eyes, half closed, rested on Ermissende; and as his livid lips pronounced her name, anger, displeasure, yielded to the thrill of tenderness and love. Borne to the cavern-haunt of plunder, for days he

he languished under the smarting anguish of his wounds; yet was his mind at rest, for Ermissende tended his couch, and softened all his sorrows.

"Whither were you hastening?" demanded the chief of the band, as, with Montbelliard, he emptied a flaggon to the returning health of Montaubin. "Marry, but you had brave hearts to resist our numbers!"

"We had nothing to lose," said Montbelliard—"When expectation closes, life has little to wish for."

"Your blows were dealt as though expectation was but newly opening," rejoined the robber. "But say, my gallant hero, for as I'm a living man, you fought bravely, has Fortune banished you her favour? and has the world turned you adrift?"

"Even

"Even so," replied Montbelliard; "the fickle goddess has played us false; and man——"

"What if you swell our list?" interrupted the bandit. Montbelliard mused.—"'Tis a life of hazard, but 'tis a life of independence," pursued the robber: "spirits like yours would nerve our strength, and the world's slights would give a just cause for vengeance."

"True," said Montbelliard, still musing.

"Unanimity is our bond, and courage our reliance," continued the chief; "and for our treasury, it might woo a monarch's favour; years has it been amassing. Come, your hand; increase its store, and you shall share the benefit."

Montbelliard extended his hand; but as he grasped the robber's, a deep, a sub-

the project pervaded his mind, a project more inviting than e'en the lure of casual depredation. Quick was the proposal conveyed; Montauban, alike a bankrupt in credit as in wealth, acquiesced, and riot and intemperance sealed the bond of sworn fealty.

Yet though the charm of novelty oft lures the eye, oft mocks the sense, Ermissende greeted not the new career of danger; it was not guilt from which she shrunk appalled, but the rude uncourtly band, which, from the contrasting remembrance of her former associates, appeared more uncouth, more unseemly. In vain Montauban urged submission, in vain he argued the necessity of acquiescence. Ermissende was dispirited, unhappy; she pined for change, she languished for the gaieties, the refinements of Paris;

the

the cavern was a dreary grave to her prospects, and the undisguised admiration of a lawless troop but a faint tribute to her matchless charms.

"Let us fly," murmured the tempter, as she clung around the neck of the fascinated Montauban: "enriched with the spoils of plunder, let us forswear, let us escape this disgraceful band."

"But how?" demanded Montauban, as he strove to sooth her agitation; "how elude the hundred eyes which mark our movements?"

"By courage, by perseverance," replied Ermissende, "nay, by a thousand means which necessity and inclination warrant."

"Impossible," resumed Montauban, after the pause of a moment. "Newly initiated, the dragon-watch, suspicion, never

never slumbers, and death closes the slightest infringement of our oath." Ermissende shuddered. "We must retain the mask of seeming acquiescence," continued Montauban, "nor impoliticly arm the relentless hand of power."

Ermissende was submissive; through necessity she veiled her feelings in the artful guise of soft allurement; but ever did her truant mind spurn at the bonds of rude detention, and pant for pictured freedom.

Warm in the cause, and eager to substantiate his courage and his fealty, Montauban pierced e'en the heart of danger, and dared each stroke of fortune. It was in an enterprize, in which numbers and resistance combined to daunt the plunderers' hopes, that Montauban's single arm turned the scale of victory. The

assailed

assailed subdued, the treasure all their own, the wounded bandit was borne to the cavern, the sad, the only drawback to their triumph.—That night he died; and ere the morning sun blushed on the mountain's top, Montauban was elected —Montauban was chosen—Montauban, the once hopeful heir of title and of fortune, the once worshipped offspring of an indulgent father, received the oaths of sworn allegiance, and became the willing commander of a fierce and lawless band.

From this period the long and smothered projects of Montbelliard grew into form; aided by an arm so strong, so firm, so often tried, where existed the power to intercept the soaring flights of his ambition—"Yes, I will tempt his avarice," he exclaimed; "plunder shall

be

be the lure;" and then his deep and subtle mind mused o'er the dark design. Ermissende, murmuring, dissatisfied, was a necessary auxiliary; he knew she swayed the inmost soul of Montauban; and to insure her interest was to insure success —"'Tis pity," artfully insinuated Montbelliard, as in the flower-bespangled valley he wandered by the side of Ermissende, "that days, and weeks, and months should wear away in these inhospitable wilds!—Why should a gem so rich be lost?" Ermissende started—Ermissende's eyes were fixed upon him— "In Paris," he continued, "the admiring gaze would estimate your beauties—beauties which here——"

"In Paris," interrupted Ermissende, and deep was the vermilion of her cheek, "ah, would I were again in Paris!"

"You

"You may return there—you shall return there," rejoined Montbelliard; "nay, you shall outvie your former splendour, if——"

Ermissende snatched his arm, for he paused as though in abstraction—"If what?" she importuned. Still Montbelliard was silent—"Take me from this odious solitude, point out the road to Paris, and though obstacles of giant-mould close upon the entrance, yet will I seek to surmount them."

"Can you be firm?" demanded Montbelliard.

"Yes, as yon rocky base," replied Ermissende, pointing to the range of cliffs on the opposite side the valley.

"Can you be silent?"

"As the grave," was her response.

Montbelliard gazed intently on her face,

face, yet did no varying tint betray her feelings—"Montauban and his followers once secure in our interest," he resumed, "and splendour and fortune, honours and homage be our own."

"Name that interest," exclaimed Ermissende, "and perish the influence of beauty, the power of love, if I obtain not his permission!"

"Ours is a life of plunder," said the wary Montbelliard, "and whether we fall upon the houseless traveller, or whether we attack him in his citadel, is immaterial."

"True," said the attentive Ermissende; "proceed."

"In these lone mountains the duke de Vermandois sojourns—his wife—his infants——" Montbelliard hesitated, for Ermissende's features drooped in sadness.

"Alas!"

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "what has the duke's sojournment at Vermandois to do with my return to Paris?"

"Much," rejoined Montbelliard, attentively marking each change of countenance: "his wealth would purchase pleasures rivalling all our former splendour."

"His wealth!" echoed the still doubtful Ermissende.

"Our troop once safe within the castle walls," whispered the count, "where is the obstacle that bars my——*our* path to elevation?"

I will not dwell upon the doubts and fears, the half-yielding, half-reluctant scruples which, for a time, alternately swayed the mind of Ermissende, but will quickly pass to when the tempter triumphed, when mercy, compassion, and every

every christian virtue yielded to the mad, the intemperate love of pleasure and of admiration

" And will you ne'er renounce the hand which gave you power?" demanded Ermissende; " will you, when elevated to the dizzy height of greatness, ne'er disdain Montauban's friendship?"

" No, beauteous Ermissende!" replied Montbelliard, " Montauban shall be, as now, my friend—as now, the partner of my splendour."

" Enough," said Ermissende; " all doubt, all hesitation ceases; for Fortune smiled in favour when hither she insnared us."

Artful were the blandishments of beauty to silence the shuddering scruples of Montauban, subtle the wily casuisty of love, deep the studied aid of soft endear-

ment

ment—Ermissende conquered. Montauban pledged himself, his troop, the ready instruments of Montbelliard's approaching greatness. A scheme so hazardous, so profound, required time to bring it to the ripening point of execution; nay, more, it required the aid of foresight and politic manœuvring: to blind the eyes of suspicion, to silence the possibility of inquiry, Montbelliard was to quit the cavern, was to return to the haunts of society.

"To your protection I consign my Ermissende," said Montauban, his reflections closing in the determination of reconnoitring in disguise the approach and situation of the castle de Vermandois. Ermissende started—"In safety at the cavern I cannot leave you," pursued the thoughtful bandit, in reply to her

half-formed objections; "and should Fate design my fall, Montbelliard will be your friend."

"Yes, devotedly, eternally!" exclaimed the count; "Ermissende shall be my charge—Ermissende shall be——"

"*Your sister!*" fiercely interrupted Montauban.

"Point out the sanctuary where I can deposit her," said Montbelliard, diving at once into his suspicions; "and till you accompany me, we never meet."

Again Montauban was thoughtful; then suddenly starting, he required of Ermissende the promise to tarry at the nearest hamlet, until the enterprize was over.

Thus arranged, thus secure beyond the possibility of discovery, Ermissende retired to the villa, which the foresight of

caution had provided; and Montbelliard, enriched from the coffers of the banditti, plunged again into dissipation, wearing, under the mask of indifference, the ceaseless anxiety of suspense, apprehension, and impatience. Nature was dead within him, for no relenting softness pleaded a brother's cause; he pined to possess the title, the dignity of his ancestors; and though blood was the heavy purchase, yet did he not shrink from the attainment.

But Montauban, the ready tool of his secret machinations—Montauban, lured by promised recompence, spurred by the artful wiles of beauty, disguised, alone, visited the lonely pine forest which embowered the time-worn turrets of Vermandois. There the inventive brain of unrelenting villany planned the dire

dire snare of quick destruction. 'Twas treachery, not strength, which wore the smiling promise of success; for the moat was deep, was not to be forded, and the outer walls impregnable. Montauban, versed in subtilty, practised in design, returned to his companions; he spoke of courage, of mortal daring, dwelt on the golden bait of plunder, and revealed the long-projected enterprize; yet did he hide the name of Montbelliard, yet did he veil the secret spring of action. Bright flashed the blade of each unsheathed cymeter, loud echoed the burst of acquiescence, the oath of unanimity —"Lead on, lead on!" was the mingled shout; while Montauban, elated with success, exclaimed—"Courage, my brave compeers! Vermandois ravaged—Ver-

mandois desolated, becomes a future haunt, a shelter, and a safeguard."

Lamballe, a long-tried, staunch, and trusted member of the troop, was quick selected, a ready actor in the treacherous drama. With artful caution he guised the blackening dye of villain, and with a seeming show of industry and honour, armed with the plaint of moving sorrow, he repaired to the portal of Vermandois. Ah, fatal slumber of security!—fatal extent of benevolence and pity! The snare unguessed at, the serpent unconfessed, was admitted an inmate, was enrolled a domestic of the household.

Thus far secure, exulting in the prospect of success, the banditti panted for the hour of action—panted to reap the golden harvest of promised recompence: but

but Montauban, more wary—Montauban, doubtful even of Montbelliard's faith, determined again to hear the grounds of future expectation. Absenting himself from his associates, he repaired to the known retreat of his friend.

"Is it over?" eagerly demanded Montbelliard, grasping the extended hand of Montauban.

"I am to share your wealth—I am to command your interest," said Montauban, regardless of the inquiry.

"A handsome sum shall recompence the service; but for interest—interest," hesitating, "cannot aid your present calling."

Fierce was the glance which darted from Montauban's eye; yet did he check the impulse of his anger, as coldly he

resumed—" The free, the uncontrouled range of Vermandois is my own."

" Has death then snatched the barrier?" questioned Montbelliard.

" Your brother lives!" exclaimed Montauban.

" Lives!" echoed the disappointed Montbelliard.

" But mark me, another week silences his worldly cares."

Montbelliard smiled; and then he listened to the ripening project, and then he acquiesced in all demands.

But Montauban's suspicions once raised, were not to be appeased; the demur, the hesitation was conclusive; conviction whispered, the heart depraved, needs a check to enforce obedience, and that check his busy imagination quick designed

signed—" Ungrateful wretch !" exclaimed Montauban, as musing o'er the past, he retraced his lonely road; " yes, I will reserve a spur to enforce submission—a rod of iron o'er thy head, which, as my slave, shall bind thee."

Instantly, from the dire list devoted to destruction, the young St. Julien's name became expunged: it was not mercy, it was policy, which acting on the designing mind of Montauban, rescued Vermandois's heir—rescued him to enforce, to strengthen the bond of sworn submission—" He shall find," muttered the sullen Montauban, " that I am no child in practice; that as I am quick in design, so am I firm in determination."

The conflict once passed, the deed of murder once perpetrated, to escape the possibility of surprise, the danger of dis-

covery, Montauban and his troop were to fly their hidden haunt, and sojourn 'midst the branching intricacies of a cavern, chiselled by Nature's hand, in the flinty bosom of a rock shelving the foaming bed of the Garonne—a cavern long the rendezvous of the banditti, long the secret repository of their treasures.

Thus arranged, Montauban, the third night previous to the intended surprise of the castle, stole to the retreat of Ermissende. He found her impatient to hail the moment of enlargement—eager, panting to realize the anticipation of returning greatness: compassion pleaded not the cause of the oppressed; gentleness tinged not the sway of action. Her stern unbending spirit belied the outward softness of her form; for Nature, perhaps in sport, perhaps in contradiction,

tion, had cased a black insidious heart in the angel blandishment of meekness and love.

"And we remove from Gascony," said Ermissende; "we dissolve all connexion with the banditti?"

"If our enterprize succeeds," answered Montauban.

"Exists there a doubt?" demanded the half-alarmed Ermissende.

"Not if all ears are alike deaf to the pleading call for mercy," replied the chief.

"Then be the day our own," resumed the fiend-like Ermissende. "Bid them be prompt to execute the order, nor spare one of the race, no—no—not one. Montauban," and she lowered her voice to a whisper, "death alone can seal the secret."

Montauban shuddered in momentary hesitation—alas! it was but momentary; for the siren's snowy arms were fast intwined around his neck; and as she hid her dimpled cheek upon his bosom, she whispered, with a mingled smile of encouragement and irony—"*How little do these woman's fears accord with former resolution!*"

Montauban started—he grasped the hilt of his sword—" Ermissende, doubt me not," he exclaimed; " my courage is as potent as your sway!"

" Then no relenting softness will wage against our interest," rejoined Ermissende; " no intruding pity will mar the elevation of our friend."

" None, none," repeated the bandit.

" How will impatience mock delay, and pant to meet the hero!" said the fair enticer.

enticer. "Montauban," and she grasped the hand, the finger, which the pledge of her first vows encircled, "here will I tarry until your wished return. When resolution falters, look on that ring, and think of Ermissende—Ermissende, compelled by dire necessity to sojourn 'midst a ruffian crew—Ermissende, whom courage, whom perseverance can restore to splendour."

Montauban snatched her to his bosom —Montauban, lost, entranced, pledged e'en his soul's eternal peace to woo the smile of favour.

The night rose dark and stormy, as the traitorous band, in ambush lay within the clustering shadow of the pine forest: shrouded by thick and heavy clouds, the moon, in partial efforts, faintly gleamed, and then again was lost; but not a single

star spangled the hollow arch of heaven; it seemed as though they shrunk dismayed from the dire scene of murder. The heavy clock, from the high turret of the castle, tolled the midnight hour, as Montauban stole from his covert. Panting for blood, with unsheathed blades, silent and swift the banditti followed: at the moat's edge they paused, and then Montauban, by a shrill whistle, gave the signal of approach. The drawbridge was lowered; Lamballe, their trusted emissary, opened the out portal of the castle, and soon the shrieks of mingled anguish and despair marked the dire reign of horror. Havock and murder spread around, and darkness blended foe and friend.

Momentary was the resistance of the ill-fated duke de Vermandois: awakened by

by the shrieks of the duchess, his head scarce raised from his pillow, his hand scarce grasped his sword, ere it sank powerless in death.—The stroke was deep, was sure; one hollow groan—one faint, one ineffectual struggle, and every pang was closed. In vain his frantic partner invoked the sure swift antidote to sorrow: tired of slaughter, mistaken mercy interposed, and dragged her from the lifeless body of her lord, unconscious e'en of the existence of his offspring—she was secured within a hidden chamber of the castle, and left to the moanings of her own complaint.

'Midst the loud din of mingled horror and confusion, Du Plessis rushed from the castle; it was for life he fled—life, Nature's charge, to which, almost in death, we strive to cling. As he paused

in

in the court-yard, dreading a dagger in each coming sound, the moon, casually darting from its obscurity, reflected on the flying form of a female, vainly essaying to escape from the uplifted blade of an assailant. The thought, the action was one; Du Plessis sprang towards her, and as she sank beneath the stroke, he snatched an infant from her arms, exclaiming, in a voice of seeming hoarseness—"Hold! hold! enough of blood! I'll plunge it in the moat!" and then he fled towards the drawbridge, and crossed it unperceived.

It was Louisine, the infant daughter of the murdered Vermandois! But already has her preservation been explained—already has the humanity of Du Plessis been registered; therefore return we to the strides of villany, with horror and reluctance

reluctance to unfold the hidden deeds of Montauban. Selecting the richest portables in the castle, more effectually to colour the transaction, at dawn of day the plunderers quitted Vermandois, leaving Lamballe bound, in politic compliance, with the small remnant of the escaped domestics; but more to tend on the captive duchess, whom a transient flash of mercy, in the relenting feelings of Montauban, had snatched from death.

Piercing the pine forest, wandering 'midst the lonely passes of the Pyrenees, heading his followers, and watching himself the unconscious heir of title and of fortune, he reached the retreat which had long and successfully veiled the depredations of plunder. It was a cavern, as I have before expressed, opening in a rock which edged the Garonne, and extending

tending beneath the adjoining monastery of Valombre. Montauban knew it contiguous to the retirement of the injured D'Argenton, yet did his heart shrink not in reproach, yet did conscience upbraid not with dishonour. Ermissende was his own, and had she been purchased with a thousand lives, momentary would have been the hesitation—Ermissende was his own, and the sufferings, the injuries of a brother, were unthought of—Ermissende was his own, and every other claim was obliterated. He wished to preserve the hapless heir of the murdered Vermandois, and what asylum could he find, more secure, more desirable, than the monastery of Valombre? yet he knew not how to introduce the orphan—he knew not how to ensure the interest of the community; and to become the

young

young St. Julien's pleader, was, judging by his own heart, to destroy at once the cause. Implicitly confiding in the powers and decisions of Ermissende, his reflections closed in the determination of leaving St. Julien, as the child of his adoption, at the cavern, of repairing to her retreat, of unfolding the secret spring of apparent mercy, his suspicions of Montbelliard, and his plan of retaining the unconscious boy, as a certain and secure means of ensuring the claims of service.

Panting again to behold the beauteous object of his undeviating affection, to breathe the gratulations of returning splendour, he left the young St. Julien in charge of his associates, and quitted the cavern. With hasty strides he pursued the winding course of the Garonne; his

his eyes bent upon the earth; his imagination fearfully shrinking from the past, and wandering, in wild latitude, o'er the future. Not once did he pause, not once did he survey the grey spires of Valombre, for the exultation of success glowed upon his cheek, and the corroding influence of remorse was not yet awakened.

It was twilight when he reached the dwelling of Ermissende; the moon had not arisen, but the bright star of evening shone resplendent in the heavens. Elated, he flew through the garden; he mounted the steps of the portico, yet did no gladsome sound salute his ear. He knocked impatient for admission; and when the door was opened, rushed into the hall, and hurried to the chamber of of Ermissende: but it was solitary—it was deserted; no cheerful blaze enliven-

ed

ed the hearth, or indicated the return of its mistress. In vain he called upon her name, in vain he searched each separate chamber; Ermissende was lost, was fled; and racked with a thousand fears, a thousand fancies, the almost-frantic Montauban, summoning the servant, sought an explanation. 'Twas then every warring principle of action rushed to his heart—'twas then he waged eternal enmity to power and to justice—'twas then he breathed the dire imprecation of revenge —for 'twas then he heard, that two nights preceding, sanctioned by the royal signet, the shrieking Ermissende had been conveyed from her retreat.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

My thoughts grow wild,
And let in fears of ugly form upon me. OTWAY.

CALMNESS, meekness, temperance, reigned in the monastic cell of Valombre; but though the gust of passion was forbidden, though the principles of sublunary interest were nominally expunged, yet will Nature linger in defiance of severe decision—yet, to the latest breath of vital existence, will she maintain her pristine sway. The abbot St. Theodore, because the wild burst of first-violated feeling had subsided, had yielded to the soul-soothing influence of devotion, fancied that the world, and the world's once-cherished claims, held no empire o'er his heart, fancied that contempt and injury, sorrow and persecution, were alike powerless to wound.

wound. But alas! the apathy of indifference reigned but in idea, and the lambent flash of newly-awakened sensibility tinged his wan cheek, when his eyes, decyphering a letter sent by express to the convent, traced the well-remembered name of Ermissende. It was penned in all the delicate caution of friendship; yet did its contents, freezing the current of hope, strike as a deathblow to his feelings. It stated that Ermissende, still an alien to virtue, had returned to France; that no indication of remorse marked contrition for the past, or amendment for the future; that under the blind infatuation of outraged affection, she lived the mistress of Montauban, and now, in the transient absence of her seducer, awaited him at a villa, a few leagues from Tarascon.

Alas!

Alas! how in one short moment did the actions of St. Theodore record the fatal return of interest!—how, in one short moment, did the worthless, the ungrateful Ermissende, arouse him from the lethargy of feeling! but still did religion, still did devout inspiration, tinge each ideal exertion: it was to tear her from infamy—it was to save her soul from perdition—it was to remove her from the dire infection of sin, that occupied every energy of his comprehensive mind—it was not to see, but to save the woman upon whom he had once so fondly doted—it was not to persecute, but to reclaim the woman whom Heaven's sanction had given to his love. Deep were his reflections, firm were his resolves; they were formed, they were designed in the long and sleepless hours

gifted

gifted to repose; they were sealed, they were stamped on the sacred altar of his worship. Not one particle of malice, not one instigation of revenge, decided his mode of conduct.

He wrote to the monarch, whose friendship had shone on his worldly pursuits; he recalled to remembrance the sad tale of past sorrow—the treachery of a trusted brother—the desertion of a cherished wife: lightly he passed over the frenzy of his feelings, the long, the fearful lapse of reason; but dwelt with gratitude on the restoration of composure, on the ameliorating offices of religion, on the peaceful unanimity of his fraternity. Quick followed, in the letter he had received, the incursion on his long-enjoyed calm, the sad renewal of agitation, of anxiety; and the conclusion conveyed a petition

petition for the removal of the fair author of his calamity far from the snares of artifice, far from the corruptions of sensuality. He hinted the necessity for secrecy in eluding the hereafter-search of Montauban; and implored indulgence, that in the lenient order of Bena Copia, gentleness, not severe denunciation, might awaken the self-awarded restrictions of penance.

He thought he knew the human heart —he thought it might be weaned, but not threatened—he thought it might live to conviction, though stubborn and dead to coercion and menace—he thought the true spirit of holiness, softly, mildly, gently instilled, might gradually recall the wandering mind, and restore it to unshaken virtue—" Yes, she will live to thank—she will live to bless the saving

clause

clause of mercy," he articulated, as, in his "mind's eye," he beheld her beauties veiled in the dingy habit of the order—"she will mourn the past—she will confess the deeds of sin, and, by repentance, court the balm of favour. Torn from the tempter's wiles, her native innocence will yet revive; and even Montauban with horror be remembered."

Alas! he knew not the dark, the malignant nature of the Circe—he knew not that art, that design had stamped every action of the once-playful Ermissende, and rendered her a willing convert to the flowery delusions of vice—he knew not how deep she had plunged into the mazes of infamy—he knew not that she was the beguiling fiend, even to murder. Affection still lingered, and what is half so palliating as affection? St. Theodore,

though the inmate of a religious cell, though dead to the world, was alive to its influence; and many a bitter tear did he shed at the anticipated sufferings of an ungrateful woman, who, lost to principle, to virtue, and to honour, had blasted his every hope of felicity, and doomed the lingering span of his existence to solitude and woe.

The reply was quick, was conciliating; it came to announce the execution of the order—the eternal seclusion of Ermissende. Shrieking, reluctant, in the absence of Montauban, she had been removed from her retirement, and now buried in the profound seclusion of Bena Copia, under the name of the sister Laurette, was lost to every eye, save its holy inmates. Alas! no religious zeal inspired her—no gleam of soul-soothing resignation

resignation augured the awakening dawn of peace: she was stern—she was proud —she was unbending; scoffing at the counsels of the mother superior, and execrating the tyranny of compulsion. Sometimes perversely silent; sometimes cursing the secret power which had thus doomed her to a living death: now peremptorily abjuring religion; and now defying its sacred ministers, and laughing at its threatened vengeance.

St. Theodore trembled; his hands were clasped, his eyes were suffused in tears— "Lost, lost Ermissende!" he ejaculated; and then he shuddered, for it seemed as though he had presumptuously limited the power of Heaven—"No, not lost," he resumed, as piously he crossed his bosom; "the spirit of pure conviction cleanses the foulest deeds, and bleaches

the blackest dye of sin, even to the unspotted semblance of drifted snow: example may yet soften the jarring principles of action, and bend the contrite soul of Ermissende to gentleness and submission!"

Many days elapsed ere the agitated feelings of St. Theodore returned to their native calm, ere, without the treacherous sigh of soft emotion, he could breathe the prayer for Ermissende's conversion, ere, in the true spirit of Christian charity, he could raise his eyes to the Throne of Grace, and pronounce pardon of the past.—Montauban, his brother; painful was the task of forgiveness—Montauban, who had probed his heart's quick, who had blasted his honour, who had insidiously stolen into his sanctuary, and violated his dearest hopes; yet did he pray for

for him; yet did he supplicate mercy; yet did he feel that general philanthropy, which glows in the heart of virtue, which tinctures it with the blessed calm of peace, with the pure essence of charity.

The vigil of St. Fabian was closed, when the abbot quitted the chapel: fatigue courted the seclusion of his cell; languor banished the social call of communication; sleep hung heavy upon his senses, and the peaceful calm of forgetfulness promised a short cessation from care; but, alas! that promise was as the feeble tenor of his former joys. He started at the call of the monk Betsolin, and listened to the urgent solicitations of an intruding stranger with wonder and dismay; his cheek was pale, his eyes wildly fixed upon the brother, as he recited the incoherent discourse of the unknown.

"He is importunate," said father Betsolin; "his breast labours with some secret sin, which nought, save the balm of confession, can ameliorate. He says he is sorely burthened—that he is weary with toil and travel, and that peace and rest can ne'er revisit his wearied eyelids, until in your ear, reverend father, he has breathed the secret of his woes. I offered my aid, my prayers; but both were rejected. He bade me hasten to you—he bade me rouse you from slumber—he bade me whisper the name of Ermisende."

The abbot started; attention changed to agony; every limb trembled, and every feature became convulsed.

"Alas! you know the stranger?" pursued the monk; "perhaps connected, united, some painful link in the chain of misfortune——" "No,

"No, no," interrupted the abbot, "not connected—not united—but Ermissende—what knows he of Ermissende?"

"You are ill—you are agitated," said father Betsolin. "Suffer me first——"

"Ermissende — Ermissende," again burst from the livid lips of St. Theodore; and then he sprung from the mattrass, and grasped the arm of the monk; but his feelings mocked the attempt, and gasping, almost breathless, he was again compelled to pause—"Holy Heaven!" he ejaculated, when a few swollen tears gave relief to his pent-up bosom, "how vain, how presumptuous is man, to arrogate an empire Nature spurns at! Resignation may soften affliction, but it blunts not the keen edge of calamity; it may, it does render man submissive to

the Divine Will; but surely," and his clasped hands were raised in pious appeal, "those keen, those poignant sensations, which the Creating Hand engendered, are not as symbols of weakness and warring irresolution! Where is the stranger?" again addressing the monk.

"In the chapel," replied father Betsolin; "I left him at the foot of the confessional, anxiously awaiting your appearance."

"Said he no more than Ermissende?" again demanded the abbot. The monk hesitated—"Fear not," pursued St. Theodore, "fortitude and resolution have conquered. I am prepared to bow to Heaven's decrees—fear not," and he forced a sickly smile; "my reason admits misfortune a wholesome and necessary chastisement—'tis as medicine to the body,

Body, ungracious to the taste, but salutary in its effects."

Father Betsolin extended the ring he had received from the imagined penitent. The abbot took it, gazed at it, and instantly his agitation returned: again his cheek mocked the marble's whiteness, and again his lip quivered with labouring emotion. He sank on his knees before the little crucifix which hung at his bed's foot, and unmindful of the presence of the monk, for many moments continued wrapt in silent communion. Rising with restored composure, he examined the little bauble, and recognised the first pledge of early love, which, in a moment of confiding tenderness, he had placed on the finger of Ermissende. A thousand doubts assailed him; and quick investing himself in the serge cloak of

his order, he snatched the taper from the hand of father Betsolin, and hastened to the chapel.

CHAP. IX.

Oh, it is monstrous! monstrous!
Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;
The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder,
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounc'd
The name of *brother*. SHAKESPEARE.

.....

I do not shame
To tell you what I was, since my conversion
So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am.

SHAKESPEARE.

NOT in ceaseless unavailing plaints did Montauban lavish the passing moments —not in the loud burst of unmeaning imprecation, or the deep malignity of revenge:

revenge: no, suspicion stamped the die of action—suspicion pointed to the cloistered abbot of Valombre, and in one short hour the plan of procedure was arranged. Flying the deserted retreat of Ermissende, he returned to the cavern, his heart racked with disappointment, and his mind alternately agitated with hope, or depressed with despair; now picturing Ermissende restored to his arms—now decking her in the chilling garb of religion, her beauty and her youth condemned to solitude and woe—her sighs, her shrieks, and her reluctance, subdued by the coercion of power. Shuddering at the fearful sketches of imagination, picturing the abbot St. Theodore as the author of her removal, he determined to visit Valombre, and accuse him of the theft. With ease could he penetrate the

most hidden haunts of the monastery; for the cavern, by a long and narrow ascent, communicated with the ruined archway, and opened at the foot of the belfry of the little chapel in the garden, by a secret opening or trap-door, curiously contrived, and hid from external observation by a square tablet of Parian marble, apparently closing the mouth of a sarcophagus. How and for what end this communication was constructed, Montauban sought not to discover: Nature had chiselled the cavern, but ingenuity had framed the spring, and industry had hollowed the flinty steps, winding up the steep side of the almost-perpendicular ascent. At first, by this accidentally-discovered entrance, he thought to rush into the presence of his injured brother, and, by the aid of threats and entreaties,

to

to obtain the desired information; but the dread of observation, the possibility of the monks discovering the secret passage, and perhaps obstructing his retreat, baffled his preconcerted scheme, and left him undecided. Interest placed a strong guard o'er the life of the young St. Julien; and where could he more effectually preserve his charge than in the solitude of Valombre? his life with pious care would be preserved; and, as circumstances warranted, he might hereafter become an offering to Heaven, or an unconscious instrument of vengeance o'er the head of Montbelliard.

Thus mentally arguing, Montauban closed in the resolution of concealing the slumbering St. Julien beneath his roquelo, presenting himself as a penitentiary at the grate of the monastery, and openly

openly claiming the benefit of confession. Though the plan, no sooner formed than executed, closed, as the reader already knows, in the murder of St. Theodore, and the flight of the unknown, yet we feel it necessary, in the gradual solution of the mystery, to follow his steps even into *the confessional of Valombre*. Ermissende was the instigating fiend who fanned the burning fire of Montauban's brain—Ermissende, whom infatuation and sympathetic guilt stamped as necessary to his existence. Impatient, almost to frenzied rashness, he awaited the approach of the abbot. He heard him ascend the steps of the confessional; yet his heart smote him not—Ermissende hung upon his lips—hope glowed upon his cheeks. 'Tis true, with cautious care he shrouded his features; yet when the agitated

agitated accents of St. Theodore, labouring 'gainst his feelings, reached his ear—when the meek admonition for repentance, the pious hope of promised pardon was half pronounced, he dashed the upraised cross from the hand of the abbot, and fiercely demanded the restoration of Ermissende—"Tell me," he exclaimed, grasping the nearly-paralyzed arm of his brother, "whither you have conveyed her?" The abbot shrunk in horror—"Tell me," continued the impatient Montauban, "how far the abuse of power, violating the free right of election, has dared to extend?" Still was St. Theodore silent—"Hypocrite!" pursued the enraged bandit, "disclose the accursed tale of treachery and violence, or Heaven's sanctuary shall not withhold my vengeance?"

"*Treachery!*"

"*Treachery!*" repeated the abbot, in accents of firm reprehension; "lost, misguided being! is it for you to talk of *treachery?*"

Montauban shrunk from the piercing eye of his brother: truth, conviction, all witnessed against him; yet momentary was the pang of condemnation—momentary the indication of remorse: again he snatched the serge cloak of the abbot, and again, with bitter imprecations, he demanded where Emmissende was concealed?

"She is removed from the contamination of guilt," coldly replied St. Theodore; "she is securely hid from the most vigilant inquiry."

"You confess then the knowledge of her removal?" said Montauban.

"More, much more," eagerly exclaimed

ed the superior—" I glory in having snatched her from the shackles of sin: example can no longer vitiate: oh, no," and piously he crossed his bosom, " the mild admonitions of charity, the persuasive eloquence of virtue, is all that now can reach her ear—is all that now can assail her heart!"

Montauban started—Montauban's hand grasped the dagger—" Name her retreat?" he importuned—" name the hidden den of penance, or dread the appalling thunder of my wrath? Think not to daunt me—your cowl is no safeguard—I have forsworn every claim of nature and of habit. Tremble, weak fool! for inclination is my law, and my authority owns no limitation."

" Your power is, as yourself, subservient to the will of Heaven," meekly replied

plied the abbot. "Alas! 'tis for you to tremble—you, sacrilegious blasphemer! for the hour will come, when the fearful record of the past shall be as the blackening fiat of the future."

It is useless to expatiate upon the increasing rage of Montauban, or the firm defiance of St. Theodore; the one was dead to mercy and compassion, the other to personal fear; and not till the stroke of death was aimed—not till the bright blade of the dagger was sheathed in the virtuous bosom of the superior—not till extended, lifeless, he lay at the murderer's feet, did the horrid, the accursed deed burst on his senses; then his heart felt frozen to ice—then his eyes were wildly extended—then his hands were clenched in agony and woe. But too late was contrition; past was the power

of

of reparation; the confessional was stained with the still-streaming blood of the abbot, and the functions of life were closed.

Montauban dropped the unconscious heir of the already-murdered Vermandois; the child shrieked—that shriek banished the numbing torpor of inaction, and recalled the necessity for exertion—that shriek closed in the fancied step of a pursuer, and filled the coward-soul of the fratricide with horror and dismay. Like Cain, hell in his heart, and the bleeding form of St. Theodore in his eyes, he fled the confessional, hurried from the chapel, nor paused till he reached the ruined archway; then, as he had previously planned, he blew a shrill blast on his horn, and instantly the trap-door was raised. Pale, shuddering, he rushed down

the

the steps, nor e'en to the questions of his associates returned an answer.

It was long ere riot and intemperance banished the appalling remembrance of *the confessional of Valombre*—ere in sleep he lost sight of the injured form of his brother—ere in day's meridian splendour, the last sigh, the last lingering struggle of life was effaced. Peace was eternally poisoned—hope was eternally fled—Ermissende was lost for ever, and without her, joyless was the promise of wealth. Not the voice of friendship could tempt him from his haunts—not the allurements of gaiety could induce him to forego the dangers and hazards of his occupation. The uncontrouled pursuits of plunder, the uncurbed latitude of a freebooter's life, suited his restless spirit, and gave a ceaseless spur to his exertions.

Montbelliard,

Montbelliard, the unsuspected representative of his ancestorial dignities, with well-assumed regret, mourned the fatal extinction of the murdered family of Vermandois, and, with seeming horror, condemned the scene of carnage to desertion and solitary neglect.

The castle was secretly invested in the hands of Montauban, and became a strong citadel of defence. Hid in deep and almost impervious wilds, the eye of suspicion ne'er peered within its time-incrusted battlements; and justice became evaded, because compassion restored not to freedom those whom temerity led within its shelter.

Though exertion and successful villany had thus securely placed Montbelliard in the seat of his ambition—though the title of duke de Vermandois, sounding on his ear,

ear, fed the secret exultations of his pride, yet did fear, the natural concomitant of guilt, picture a thousand dangers—augur a thousand improbabilities. Suspicion eyed e'en Montauban with doubt; and sordid avarice, and unacknowledged interest, became the imagined motives of his action—"Fool!" muttered Vermandois, when listening to the detail of murder, he heard the ill-fated duchess still existed. The crimson flush of anger dyed the cheek of Montauban —"It is mistaken mercy," pursued the duke, softened at the glance. Montauban was still silent; he suppressed his rage, nay, smiled in acquiescence—"Divested of every external benefit," pursued Vermandois, lured in the toil, "existence is but labour, and life a curse—what if we become the instruments of mercy?

mercy? Surely, my friend, the heart feels no reluctance in the relief of misery."

"As how?" demanded Montauban, apparently ignorant of the allusion.

Vermandois hesitated for a moment; then with a half smile rejoined—"Why did your daggers slumber? Our safety lay in exterminating, and one is spared, perhaps to betray the plot."

"Lamballe is wary," replied the bandit; "a captive cannot witness against us."

"Her tears may withdraw the bolts," fearfully observed the duke: "should beauty o'erthrow fidelity, where lies our security?"

"Judge his heart by your own," ironically exclaimed the chief, "and rest assured, humanity is subservient to interest."

Still

Still Vermandois was dissatisfied: his sanguinary mind pictured safety but in the murder of the unfortunate duchess, and eagerly he sought to infuse the like apprehension; yet was Montauban alike firm, alike immoveable to bribery or menace. In the cloister of Valombre he had securely deposited a sure scourge to punish ingratitude; and in the benefit of past services, he felt a sufficient claim to command the interest of Vermandois's prosperity.

"One would suppose you a novice," said the duke, as Montauban prepared to depart, "passing, as it were, o'er a sea of blood, to shrink from a blot so trifling."

"Rest satisfied with that sea," sternly replied the bandit, "or shed the blot yourself."

"Doubt not my liberality," reurged Vermandois;

Vermandois; "tax the extent of my power; name but your price, and——"

"My price," pointedly interrupted Montauban, "is that which you cannot command—*gratitude.*" Vermandois hesitated; then would have resumed, but Montauban checked him—"I know the selfish motives of your actions," he continued; "I know also," with an exulting smile, "my power over you—you are my slave—nay, do not start; and when you seek to break your shackles, then shall you feel the iron gyves which hold you."

In vain Vermandois endeavoured to resolve Montauban's threat; doubt closed each effort, and fear, with hydra train, assailed the crime-erected foundation of his greatness. The life he sought to take, suspicion whispered an offering to po-

ney, not compassion; and as his jaundiced imagination pictured, in the captive duchess, the security of the bandit's boasted triumph, he determined to tempt some readier tool to subvert hereafter malice.

Disguised, unattended, he stole from the splendid scene of his excesses, and in the known absence of the banditti, repaired to the castle de Vermandois. Soon did the glittering lure of gold subdue the half-formed scruples of Lamballe: secrecy and solitude aided the design: no tongue could whisper the tale, for no eye, save Heaven's, witnessed the transaction. The duke quitted the castle; and in the dead of night, when sorrow claimed, in slumber, a short cessation, the murderer stole into the hidden chamber of his unconscious victim, and

pledged

pledged his soul for gold. Short was the struggle—death stole on sleep, and memory and woe were passed. Lamballe dropped the still-reeking dagger, and thrusting the body into a sack, dragged it into the vaults of the castle, and consigned it to the grave precaution had already dug. But though it was hid from view—though the earth closed upon the bleeding form, still a thousand shadows seemed to flit along the gloom—a thousand voices to proclaim the deed of condemnation. Trembling he fled the vaults; but the chambers above were alike peopled, were alike armed in reproach. Gold could not heal the wounds of conscience—gold could not cleanse the blackening mildew of sin. He received the purchased bribe; but

still the murdered image of the duchess everywhere pursued him.

Framing a tale of her decease, he returned to the haunts of his colleagues. He sought to dissipate reflection in the maddening revel—he joined in each enterprise of danger—he clung to the fortune of Montauban; but still the rest of peace never, for one instant, visited his care-worn feelings, or calmed the terrors of his soul. At night he was the starting slave of fear, in the noonday-beam he trembled at the coming hours of darkness; for ever does guilt, "like brain-sick frenzy, in its feverish mood, fill the light air with visionary terrors, and shapeless forms of fear."

Years elapsed, and Montauban still headed the adventurous troop; still, resisting

sisting the incitements of the world, led on to danger, and gloried in their increasing hoard of treasures. Casual were his interviews with Vermandois, for the duke, secure in his possessions, dead to the apprehension of change, forming new projects, and new associates, strove to banish the baneful remembrance of past services: plunging in riot and licentiousness, he pursued the deluding career of pleasure, and vainly essayed to drown in intoxicating revelry, the blood-stained steps of his elevation. Sometimes, when treachery or secret strength were required to forward his designs, assuming the mask of unanimity, he would steal to the shelter of the cavern; but oftener, for months, nay, for years, did all intercourse and all communication slumber.

Montauban, whose friendship, through the inattention and sordid actions of the duke, had changed to indifference, almost to dislike, was not to be blinded by the artifice of the world: he smothered ever the contemptuous sneer; but inwardly exulted in the policy which, treasuring the rightful heir of Vermandois, invested in his hands the power of future punishment. With eager eye did he mark the gradual growth of our hero; often piercing into the garden of Valombre, and, by aid of the secret passage, diving into his cast of character. He saw him, unfixed, the creature of each succeeding whim, swayed by impulse, hurried away by feeling. Exulting in the attained knowledge, for already, in idea, had he moulded him to his interest—already had he subverted every noble

propensity,

propensity, and stamped him the willing tool of his vengeance; he fancied that temptation would easily overthrow the early-erected basis of morality, and that once removed from the dull exercise of devotion, the cramped principles of nature would find scope for action. Doubtful how to proceed, whether to leave Theodore in the monastery, to permit his sinking the victim of his enthusiasm, or whether to remove him to the cavern, and, by indulgence and conciliation, to win him to his purpose, Montauban vainly sought to resolve. Long had Vermandois persevered in silence, yet were his remittances regular, his promises unbroken; but neglect, irritating the proud spirit of the bandit, filled him with malice and indignation. He pined to enforce the galling yoke of his authority;

he pined to tell him that as he had elevated, so was his the power to debase.

Short was the lapse of irresolution—Lamballe, who had long wooed the spectre melancholy, and shrunk from the ridicule of noisy insensibility, who had often lingered beneath the walls of Valombre, and listened to the sacred psalmody of the fathers, who had caught the infection of piety, and nursed it even in the den of plunder—Lamballe fled the authority of Montauban, and eluded his most diligent search. Actuated by a new and hidden motive, he shrunk within a rocky excavation of the mountain, patiently awaiting the relaxation of pursuit, and barely supporting nature with haws, and such wild berries as the adjoining heights produced. Difficulty and endurance changed not his firm resolves; the hour

of

of remorse was arrived; conscience, with keen and persevering reproach, recalled the past, and pictured mercy but in the atoning exercise of reparation. Alas! reparation reached not the silent grave —reparation expunged not the blood of innocence: true; but the compassion, the forbearance of Heaven owns no limitation, hears the fervent offering of contrite sin, nor enjoins what the weak efforts of humanity cannot practise. Humbled to the dust, Lamballe fancied the cherub-mandate of *repentance* reached his ear, and he raised his dim eyes in hope. Bitter was the self-awarded penance; it was to clothe his gaunt limbs in the coarse serge of religion—it was to die for ever to enjoyment—it was to return to the sad scene of his iniquities—it was, without remission, to watch the

close of each successive night, to watch the rise of each successive morn, by the bed on which his victim had slumbered, in the chamber still stained with his victim's blood; nay, further, it was to guard the life of innocence—it was to warn the unwary of danger—it was to save the confiding traveller from the swords of his late associates—it was to cleanse the foul catalogue of his own crimes by persevering mercy, by ceaseless prayer, by contrition, by tears. Desirous of sharing the blessed promises of pardon, even with the relentless instigator of the murder, he conveyed a short transcript of his feelings to the duke de Vermandois, exhorting him to repentance, dwelling on the frail tenure of his possessions, the delusions, the false pleasures of the world, and the black, the o'erwhelming hour of approaching

approaching retribution. Carefully he concealed the intended scene of his penance; and concluded with again admonishing him to appease, while yet in his power, the wrath of offended justice.

Hurried away by suspicion and frenzied fear, Vermandois traced an arraigner, not an expostulator, in the self-condemned Lamballe; and instigated by the hope of checking, even by a second murder, the exposure of his crimes, he sought the presence of Montauban. Short was the conference; yet did it end in reproach, in mutual invective—Montauban played the tyrant; and the duke, unconscious of his power, accused him with ingratitude. They parted—Vermandois alive to apprehension—Montauban muttering revenge.

It was that same night, still under the influence of passion, that the bandit,

guised as a father of Valombre, penetrated within the cloister; that planning a thousand schemes of introduction, he trod even on the grave of his murdered brother. Momentary was the shudder of his feelings; smiling at self-nominated weakness, he turned from the direction of the confessional, and then starting, he shrunk within the gloomy shadow of an arch, for he heard an approaching step. His heart throbbed with exultation, his cheek glowed with imagined triumph, for, by the moon's chaste beams, he distinguished, in the intruder, Theodore—St. Julien—the lawful heir of Vermandois. He saw him approach the grave of the late abbot—he saw him kneel by the side—he saw him recline his head against the railing: now was the moment to claim the reins of authority, to persuade,

to

to awe, to bind him to obedience. Already has the interview been recited—already has the artful machinations of Montauban been portrayed. The reader may remember the long struggles of the youth—may remember, that fears for the safety of his friend and preceptor, father Betsolin, alone forged the shackles of slavery. The dread of discovery drove the bandit from the chapel; and retiring through the hidden entrance, he secretly exulted in the prospect of a new proselyte.

Months wore away in the irresolution of Montauban: he wished to try the courage, the perseverance of our hero, and by policy, progressively to steal into his confidence; he wished to subvert the early-instilled principles of education, and to implant his own rule of action, the

the unlimited sway of inclination. But the firm precepts of morality were not to be overthrown: Theodore was no changling: fear had, in some degree, stamped his conduct subservient to the authority of Montauban; but his mind defied subjection: he was obedient where sin threatened not to rule; but where falsehood, where imposition were to be practised, he became immoveable and determined.

During the long period of torture, of ceaseless regret and apprehension, the period in which he was condemned to smother the weight of care, and even to the early friend of his youth, to assume the chilling cloud of reserve, Montauban, in his casual visits at the castle de Vermandois, felt that courage may be subdued—felt that an evil conscience boasts

no

no safeguard against itself. It was then that the nocturnal perambulations of the disguised and penitent Lamballe filled the chief with dismay—it was then that his spectre appearance, that his serge cloak, his cowl and scapular, recalled *the confessional of Valombre*, and bent, even to woman's weakness, the once-hardened, the once-daring spirit of Montauban. General was the dismay which pervaded the troop, and that dismay was as a safeguard to the penitent, for it checked the peering scrutiny of curiosity; and when darkness veiled the face of Nature, left ever the eastern side of the castle free to range. Gathering courage from the imbecility of the banditti, Lamballe would sometimes visit their secret haunts, and in deep and hollow accents declaim not judgment; but oftimes dwell on the pri-

vilege

vilege of repentance; sometimes, in his fear of detection, he would flit across their path, and seek shelter in obscurity.

Montauban, fearful, by opposing Theodore's intended mission to the convent of Bena Copia, to betray the long-concealed secret of his influence, fearful lest the scrutinizing inquiries of the monks should dive into withheld confidence, and sever the bonds of his authority, assented to the youth's requested permission to depart; and tracing no change of circumstances in the transient change of situation, removed, during his absence, to the castle of Vermandois.

Thither chance, or destiny, tended the footsteps of our hero; and craving shelter for the night, he was admitted. As he followed the surly Randophe across the court-yard, entering, as it were, into

the

the den of death, Lamballe, unperceived, beheld him with compassion. Acquainted with all the intricate windings of the castle, he stationed himself in the passage, leading to the assembling-chamber of the banditti, and when lingering behind his guide, warned him, in low but impressive accents, of his danger. The penitent's intended exertions to save the life of Theodore were unnecessary, for Montauban, recognising the youth, warded off the blow of death, and guarded him with safety from the castle.

It was during Theodore's short imprisonment in the turret-chamber, when Montauban, anxious for his safety, gave him to the charge of Barnardine, that Lamballe, overhearing their discourse, formed a just estimate of the policy of the bandit, and the claim Theodore held upon

on

on his favour. He heard Barnardine expatiate upon a late interview with the duke de Vermandois, and Montauban, in answer, laugh at, and defy the threatenings of his rage. He heard him say, and exulting was the accent of his voice, that o'er Vermandois's head he held an iron rod, which blasted all his powers; and then again he gave a strict and sacred charge to guard the youth from harm; and concluded with—"*Till safe within his cloister-prison, nor enterprise nor glory be our care.*" It was conjecture all; yet did Lamballe's imagination trace in this stranger-youth the rightful heir of Vermandois—trace the real motive of Montauban's mercy, and the secret tie which bound his interest.

On the night previous to Theodore's removal to the cavern, the duke de Vermandois,

mandois, in a moment of exigence, repaired to Montauban for advice and succour. Passion had spirited him on to injustice and cruelty. Pleased with the youth, the beauty, the external graces of Louisine, he had torn her from the protection of her reputed father, and in the intended victim to perverted love, had discovered the providentially-preserved daughter of his murdered brother. With crafty design he concealed from the bandit the knowledge of existing circumstances, lest, by an unreserved disclosure, he should be providing him with arms against himself. With specious policy he represented Louisine as one in whose breast imagined injury had awakened the dire malevolence of revenge; and concluded by warmly soliciting the counsel of his long-neglected friend.

Montauban,

Montauban, with cold indifference, listened to the complaint.

"You must aid me," said the duke.

"*Must*," repeated the bandit.

"My interest, my safety, my life is at stake," pursued the agitated Vermandois —'tis you alone——"

"Can a defenceless, friendless girl shatter your fortune, wage against your interest?" interrupted Montauban.

"Yes, she can destroy my ambition," unguardedly exclaimed Vermandois; "she can——" and suddenly he paused, for the fixed glance of the chief recalled recollection.

"Proceed," said Montauban.

"She can," hesitatingly resumed the duke, "blast my approaching felicity—she can—she will poison the mind of the lady Juliette, and break off our intended nuptials." "You

"You wish her removal?" asked the bandit—"you wish her securely placed beyond the possibility of seeing the lady Juliette?"

Vermandois grasped his arm—Vermandois lowered his voice to a whisper—"I wish her life," he articulated; "not even her eternal imprisonment can satisfy me—she must die—your daggers ere now have been purchased: mark me, Montauban, she must die—aid me, and name your recompence."

For a moment Montauban hesitated; then seemed to yield. The interview was long; it closed in reconciliation; and at night part of the banditti, repairing to the villa of the duke, removed Louisine, as has been already related, to the castle de Vermandois. There the penitent Lamballe discovered, aided, soothed her

—there,

—there, at night, when the approach of Randolphe was no longer to be dreaded, he visited the grate of her turret-prison, and breathed the assurances of interest and exertion. But alas! ineffectual were his attempts at deliverance; his spectral appearance could intimidate the banditti; but though, knowing each intricate winding of the castle, he could appear and disappear almost in a breath, yet could he not sever the iron bars of detention, nor emancipate the desponding victim of cruelty and injustice.

The arrival of Theodore at the castle gave a turn to his ideas, gave colour to his hopes; Theodore, the nominated son of Montauban—Theodore, whose sensitive heart throbbed ever with humanity and feeling. It was long ere Lamballe could effect the design he meditated; yet

yet did he continue to visit the turret, and at the grate to whisper to the dejected captive, not only the existence of a friend, but also to cheer her heart with the promises of approaching exertion. But during these days of perseverinh anxiety, forming and rejecting a thousand schemes, not one jot did he relax in his self-awarded penance: the nights were passed in wandering, lamentation, and woe; sometimes by the unmarked grave in which the murdered form of the duchess mouldered; and sometimes in tracing the tardy progress of morning, her grey eye piercing within the blood-stained scene of his atrocities. Not till the night, when the alarmed Montauban, terrified at the appalling denouncements of the pretended spectre, fled his own, and sought safety in the chamber of our hero,

hero, did the pursuit of the undaunted Theodore, through the corridor and down the staircase, inspire Lamballe with the desire of luring him on, and, by persevering in his assumption of supernatural power, leading him even to the grated prison of Louisine. He did so—the sad tenant of the turret was revealed to the knowledge of Theodore, was entrusted to his protection, and circumstances combining to favour the cause of humanity, he gave Louisine into the charge of the count de Montelioné, and returned to the castle, armed with courage and cool deliberation, to stem the expected reproaches of the bandit.

The explanation which succeeded confirmed all the suspicions of Montauban. The first burst of his rage had been fatal to our hero, but for the interposing

voice

voice of Lamballe, and *Vermandois' heir*, unnerved the giant-arm of his strength. That interview, unveiling at once the hidden motives of the duke, sudden and persevering hatred aroused the dormant seeds of malice in the breast of Montauban, stamping him the foe of his once-trusted colleague. The artifice, the disguise of Vermandois, contrasting with the open ingenuousness, the spirited candour of Theodore, operated even on the depraved mind of Montauban, and deciding at once his future conduct, stamped him the friend of the oppressed. He had reverenced, even in spite of his principles, those virtues he did not himself possess: he had marked, in frequent and bitter moments of trial, the greatness of soul, the purity, the noble disinterestedness of the youth; and he had long deter-

mined, if not entirely to overthrow the pernicious policy of the usurper, and restore the rightful heir, at least to snatch Juliette from the fulfilment of a compact the ambition of a father had signed, and reward the merit, the sufferings of his nominated son.

Such was the determination of Montauban in dispatching Theodore to Lurenville Abbey; in one, to rescue the lady Juliette, and to remove, to a sure sanctuary, the devoted Louisine; yet he breathed not the close tie of consanguinity which united their fates, still undecided whether to renounce the tottering fortunes of the duke, or longer to preserve the secret of his guilt. The sealed power with which he entrusted Theodore was conclusive; it bore more firmness than malice; yet could it not be disregarded.

garded. Vermandois tore it—scattered it o'er the chapel: be it then our task to register the denouncement—" St Julien, the rightful heir of the murdered Vermandois, lives—he is in my power. Hesitate to obey my command, and though life be the forfeit of temerity, I will produce him to the world, accuse you of murder, and blast in one your fame and life. ' Montbelliard, for by that name do I alone acknowledge you, though at the foot of the altar, renounce the hand of the lady Juliette, or dread the o'erwhelming vengeance of Montauban."

It was on the first night of Theodore's departure from the castle, that the wretched, the contrite Lamballe, rising from the bed of sickness, dragged his debilitated frame to the chamber of Montauban. His errand was to excite repen-

tance,

tance, was to awaken conscience, and snatch one soul from the entangling snares of sin. In the paroxysms of pain, he had vowed to confess the dark catalogue of his enormities, to remove from Vermandois, to seek the consolation of some religious retirement, and there to implore an interest in the wronged orphan's cause.

The convent of Valombre, as being the early sanctuary of Theodore, offered, in league with justice, the additional spur of interest and affection—'twas then to the convent of Valombre he bent his pilgrimage; and thither, whilst Montauban, racked with fear and horror, raved o'er the visitation of a supposed spectre, did he with unabating toil proceed. It was to the ear of father Betsolin the tale of murder was entrusted—it was from the heart

heart of father Betsolin the appeal for exertion was solicited. Ah! what were the sensations of the monk—what his secret exultation, as he listened to the patient endurance, the firm, the uncontaminated virtues of his beloved pupil—as every fear for his safety vanished—as every doubt, to which his long and mysterious silence had given birth, faded before the charm of elucidation! It was not a common confession; it was more in the form and nature of an accusation; it was arraigning Montauban, the active agent of the count de Montbelliard, who, to ensure his own elevation, to clear the road to his ambition, had, by bribes and promises, hired the daggers of a lawless band, and planned the wide destruction of a brother's hapless family. Zealous in the cause of the oppressed, eager to

debase guilt, and to establish the rights of the unconscious heir of Vermandois, the father abbot, prompt in execution, transmitting the confession of the penitent Lamballe, claimed the aid of power, and the investigation of justice.

A guard was consequently dispatched for the seizure of Montauban and his followers; and father Betsolin, eager himself to be the glad messenger of peace to the so long-tortured heart of his beloved pupil, directed by Lamballe, who was too ill to attend, accompanied the expedition. The absence of part of the banditti gave colour to the design, for scarce was the horn sounded, ere the drawbridge was lowered, and instantly began the scene of slaughter. Like lions goaded in the toil, the banditti fought and fell; their lives, long forfeited to outraged law,

law, hailed no radiant gleam of mercy; and to revenge the treacherous snare, which led to dire defeat, was now their only aim. Montauban, wounded in the onset, was conveyed from the court-yard, and thither, with pious zeal, father Betsolin attended.

'Twas long ere exhortation checked the burst of rage, or claimed attention's patient hearing—Montauban, awakening from quick succeeding faintings, would tear the bandage from his wounds, and mock each effort to save. A scaffold seemed to close the scene of sufferance, and his proud spirit wooed the calm of death, to save the threat of public ignominy. It was to the disappointed passion of Vermandois he traced the gathering evil; and as he mused upon his total overthrow, a scheme of exquisite revenge

lightened the pangs of his endurance—"Father," he exclaimed, and beckoned to the monk, "much yet remains untold. Swear to redress the injured—swear, even to death, to persecute the murderer, and a long list of black, of damning dye shall be disclosed."

"Be ours the sacred office to right oppression," meekly replied father Betsolin. "In this awful moment of approaching fate, the sinner's soul, by ample confession, by expiation, may hope the balm of mercy."

"Theodore," faltered the nearly-exhausted Montauban; and then he paused, for deathlike was the faintness which succeeded. Father Betsolin was all ear—Montauban had struck the thrilling chord of affection, and every hope, every fond expectation was awakened.

Again

Again the powers of exertion were restored, and quick followed the so long, the so carefully-concealed secret, which had shrouded every action of the youth in the impervious veil of mystery. The scene of guilt, the scene of murder was laid open—the politic design in saving the infant heir of the duke de Vermandois, all, all was confessed, was recorded—Theodore's reserve—Theodore's hidden sorrows—Theodore's removal from the convent of Valombre.

The monk's heart yearned to behold, yearned to embrace his beloved pupil, to whisper commendation, to reveal the joyful contrast, from a supposed lineage of disgrace, to honour, to virtue, to distinction.

The return of the absent party was again marked in blood, and the few who survi-

ved the conflict, chained and guarded, were, with their treasured stores, to be removed from Vermandois, as soon as the doubtful state of Montauban was determined.

Father Betsolin, alive ever to compassion, living but in the exercise of his duty, and diligent to awaken repentance, even in the breasts of hardened guilt, patiently braved the sacrilegious blasphemy of invective and reproach, patiently stemmed the torrent of opprobrious irony, and in the separate cells of the enchained banditti, exhorted and denounced. 'Twas the signal of approach, the shrill blast of the horn, which, in the casual slumber of Montauban, attracted father Betsolin to the window. He saw the drawbridge lowered—he saw the portal unbarred, and instantly his heart hailed

hailed with delight and joy the well-remembered form of Theodore. He waited not a moment, but spite of the infirmities of age, hastened from the chamber, and descended to the court-yard: he pressed forward, notwithstanding the surrounding guard, and clasped the youth in an affectionate embrace, at the very instant when sick at heart, when tottering with despair and horror, shame, disgrace, and death, seemed to close the earthly prospect of our hero.

CHAP. X.

"Brother!—say you brother? Haste, give him to me. This blest gift smells the sweet savor of thy mercy, Heaven, and full repays the past."

.....

Despair not, for there reigns above
A potent God, that overlooks mankind:
To his directing hand submit,
For ling'ring Time knows his redressing hour.

THEOBALD.

HIGH throbbed the heart of Theodore, when, from the window of the carriage, his eager eyes caught the first glimpse of the abbey's stately turrets, and saw the embowering shadow of its age-rooted oaks, mellowed by the burnished lustre of the setting sun, when each new turn disclosed some well-known haunt; and when with haste he snatched the hand of his revered companion, father Betsolin,

and

and pointed to the cottage which had been his shelter. Every scene was revised; every past struggle remembered; his clandestine meeting with the lady Juliette, the undisguised disclosure of his descent, and the pang with which he had darted from the hermitage.

"You would have resigned her," said the attentive monk, "even when love forswore disguise—when love revealed the secret interest which gratitude and sympathy excited?"

"Yes, I would—I did resign her," rejoined Theodore—"I thought myself the son of Montauban, and, Heaven knows, her honour was dearer than my life."

"And yet you loved her," said the monk.

"*Loved her!*" repeated the enthusiastic Theodore; "ah, father! love is too faint

faint a term, for deathlike was the pang with which my honour conquered."

"It did conquer," observed the delighted father Betsolin; "and though life's future scenes presented the contrast of alluring joy, or blank and drear despondence, yet was principle unshaken, yet did rectitude maintain pre-eminence! Ah, Theodore!—St. Julien!—Vermandois! alike dear, alike beloved with an affection almost parental, virtue, rich in the radiant stamp of its own purity, now receives its recompence—now reaps its rich reward."

Theodore's hands were clasped in grateful thanks—Theodore's eyes were fixed on the countenance of his preceptor—"Great, wonderful is the Power Supreme!" he exclaimed—"through what hidden and intricate paths may we trace the hand of o'erruling Providence!

Ah,

Ah, father, armed with the adamantine breastplate of your counsels, example lured not my steps from virtue, or gave to vice one moment's triumph! Even 'midst a clan so lost, the secret end of good was working, and the loved safety of relatives and friends became the recompence of my exertion—Father——" and then he paused, and then a smile of joy o'erspread his features, for a sudden turning disclosed the bold front of Lurenville Abbey, and the next instant the carriage stopped at the gate.

How deep was the force of affection! —how fervent the expressions of gratitude, which, on every side, greeted the first entrance of our hero, when the tears of a so-lately found sister mingled with his own, and the warm embrace of friendship hailed him a deliverer! Even the marquis,

marquis, no longer blinded by prejudice, welcomed his approach; the marchioness too smiled acknowledgment: but Juliette —ah, gentle reader! Juliette looked a thousand unutterable things: and while the count de Montelioné grasped the hand of our hero, and led him to her side, be it for us to account for the sudden and unexpected removal of Louisine from the convent of Bena Copia to Lurenville Abbey.

The earth had scarce closed upon the departed form of the sister Laurette, and the slab, Nature's last monument, pressed upon her marbled bosom—scarce had the tear of pity given place to the calm of resignation, or the repeated masses for the soul's repose been chanted with the returning apathy of zealous faith, when the arrival of a messenger at the convent aroused

aroused all thoughts from the dead, and filled with agitation the heart of Louisine. He was the bearer of two letters, one from Du Plessis, her ever-beloved friend, her long-imagined father; the other from the marquis de Lurenville, not couched in the simple expressions of interest for her welfare, but glowing in the warm language of affection, breathing the kindly gratulations of relationship. The letter dropped upon the floor; a thousand new and delusive visions floated on the brain of Louisine; and long was it ere her trembling hand could resume the paper—ere her tear-fraught eyes could decypher its contents.

The marquis simply stated his intention of claiming her from the lady abbess, and retaining her under his own immediate protection, until equity and unbiassed

unbiassed investigation had established her rights, and secured her future safety: again repeating his assurances of affection and regard, he concluded by announcing the count de Montelioné's arrival at Bena Copia the following day, for the purpose of escorting his newly-acknowledged cousin to the arms of her expectant relatives.

But Du Plessis, better acquainted with the heart of Louisine, was more explicit; he spoke of his journey from Dauphiné, his health, his expectations, and gradually unfolded the long-hidden tale of mystery —"The pilgrimage of trials, of sorrows, of disappointments, are drawing to a close," he wrote: "Louisine, beloved daughter of my murdered lord—beloved, long-cherished child of my care, of my adoption, power accepts the charge, and the

the arms of an uncle are expanded to receive you. The grave loses its terrors; the languor of old age bends me to its brink; yet does no repinings, no anxieties darken its passage, or bid my drooping spirit linger. The hatred of Vermandois, the cruelty, the oppression of the tyrant, ceases to persecute; justice proclaims the award, and with a shield of adamantine strength, nature, affection environs you. Hasten then, honoured lady, and the blessing of an old man attend your steps; hasten, and be the last effort of exertion to reinstate you in your rights."

Grateful was the heart of Louisine; yet as she reperused the papers, as she hastened in search of the lady abbess, a thousand tender anticipations glowed upon her cheek, sparkled in her eyes.

Persecution,

Persecution, oppression, sorrow, all had ceased; and love, hope, peace, seemed to spring, as it were, from their ashes.

Montelioné, the cherished, the eternal partner of her solitary reflections—Montelioné, who, unknown and portionless, would have snatched her from every care, and, even in opposition to a father's prejudices, would have espoused, would have guarded her the lawful mistress of his affections—Montelioné was to be her escort to the harbour of friendship—Montelioné, her cousin.

Strange, wonderful were the secret workings of Providence! Louisine's hands were clasped in pious acknowledgment; yet was her mind, in a cursory revisal of the past, tranced in wonder. A thousand allusions, a thousand expressions, which had oft puzzled the

the mind of childhood, now spoke the hidden spring of greatness, now proclaimed the excellent, the worthy Du Plessis, more the guardian of a cherished charge, than the lawful protector of nature.

"My child," said the mother superior, returning the letters, and gazing with thoughtful care on the smiling features of Louisine, "the sun of happiness rises; prosperity beams upon your prospects, and cheers you with her gilded promises; yet beware of the secret snares, which oft beguile the judgment, and mislead the heart. In the world——"

"Ah, mother!" interrupted Louisine, "the remembrance of the past, the lessons of adversity, surely will guard the heart—surely will blunt the zest for allurement, and mistaken pleasure."

"True,

"True, my daughter," rejoined the superior, "adversity is the mind's best school; for through the infliction of endurance, it teaches us to feel for the woes of others; through the powerful aid of piety, humility, and faith, it encases us with an invulnerable defence, and enables us to maintain the combat, and ensure the victory. May Heaven watch over you!" she continued, as Louisine bent to receive her blessing; "may prosperity tend on innocence! and may you, in every change, in every vicissitude of life, rely, trace, and acknowledge the unerring wisdom of Providence!"

Though grateful for the affectionate attentions of the sisterhood, though alive to the claims of friendship, yet did the more powerful spell of love soften the anticipated hour of parting, and gild the vivid

vivid visions of futurity in peace and joy. Louisine was all expectation, was all anxiety; oft did she mount the highest turret of the monastery, which, o'ertopping the outer walls, commanded the rocky passes, and extended in a long line of prospect, fantastically diversified by grotesque rocks, green and shadowy steeps, dotted now with the towering cork-tree, and now with thickets of olives, mountain-ash, and birch; but, alas! no animating form met her eye; all was solitary and still, save when the breeze bent the flexile branches. In this silent observatory, Montelioné in her heart, and her mind alive to the alternate influence of hope and fear, did night surprise the anxious Louisine; and when she descended to the cheering converse of the sisterhood, her mind was the prey of conjuring

ring fear, and listless inquietude. Her dreams were wild, were agonizing: bliss, as a flitting vision, now pausing, now beckoning on, now eluding the promised grasp of possession, closed in the murdered haunts of banditti, and the appalling threats of Montauban. She started —she awoke—smiled at the self-torture of love, and then rose to watch

> "The morn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walk o'er the dew of *the* high eastern hill."

Every dread, every apprehension ceased in the arrival of the count de Montelioné: but though anxiety slumbered, a thousand wild tumultuous emotions were excited. A new source of delight, a new source of grateful interest glowed in the heart of Louisine: she was not the solitary remnant of an illustrious race; she had a brother—that brother had passed through

through innumerable difficulties—that brother had escaped the threats of danger, the snares of sin—that brother was the saviour of her life, was her deliverer from the turret-prison of Vermandois, was the generous, the unknown, the mysterious Theodore. Long was it ere she could attend even to the imploring accents of her lover, ere she was sensible of his solicitude and eager interest: the tide of joy had rushed impetuous on her feelings, and checked in momentary suspension the vigour of life.

Restored to animation, her spirits and her mind calmed by the salutary aid of tears, she listened to the explanatory recital of the count, and learned that, in consequence of the confession of the penitent Lamballe, a letter from the father abbot of the convent of Valombre

changing, bears still a grateful record of your virtues. Father——"

"Ah, lady!" murmured Du Plessis.

"No, no, not lady," interrupting him —"your child—your Louisine. Be you unaltered, or quick restore me back my cottage, and my humble hopes."

Grateful was the smile of fond acknowledgment: Du Plessis raised her; his heart was full; yet did he articulate— "Yes, ever to me the dearest gift of Heaven—ever to me the tender child, who shared the toil of labour, and cheered me with the eager zeal of prompt obedience!"

Calm in the influence of virtue, every mind was at peace, every heart happy. The day declined; Sol's brilliant orb sat in resplendent lustre, tinging with burnished gold the fast receding world; yet did

did no fear arise, or 'midst the sombre grey of twilight people the lowering gloom.

Surrounded by a phalanx of friends, Louisine forgot the persevering, the inveterate malice of Vermandois; nor, save her newly-discovered brother, felt that the universe contained one soul beyond. Suddenly that soft, that soul-soothing calm was broken—suddenly the deep-toned bell at the abbey-gate, followed by the quick tread of the domestics, announced some new arrival.

"It is our friend!—our cousin!—our deliverer!—it is Theodore!" exclaimed the count de Montelioné, gazing from the window; and instantly he fled the apartment, and hastened to the gate. There, with the delicacy of true interest, he unfolded the new and tender tie which

existed; and conducting father Betsolin and our hero to the saloon, beheld, with rapturous exultation, the spontaneous flow of affection, the strong union of nature, in the dear, the acknowledged ties of *brother* and of *sister*.

CHAP. XI.

Virtue does still
With scorn the mercenary world regard,
Where abject souls do good, and hope reward.
Above the worthless trophies man can raise,
She seeks not honour, wealth, or airy praise,
But with herself, herself the goddess pays. ROWE.

To pursue the steps of each several character, to minute the joy and exultation which attends ever the overthrow of villany, and the triumph of virtue, would, without encreasing the interest, be a weighty

weighty tax upon the patience of my readers, by swelling *the Confessional of Valombre* to a size far beyond its limitation. Thinking it then immaterial to state the tedious process of judicatory proceedings, the evidence of Du Plessis, the penitent Lamballe, &c. &c. with the examinations of the confessions of Montauban, and the wretched Ermissende, better known as the sister Laurette of the convent of Bena Copia, I shall cursorily observe, that the validity of the orphan Theodore, and his sister Louisine, the long-supposed daughter of Du Plessis, being fully substantiated, they became invested in all the possessions and dignities of their illustrious name; and that a formal denouncement being framed, a warrant was issued for the apprehension of the murderer and usurper Montbel-

liard. But justice, at least in this world, exerted not its retributive powers: fear gave wings to flight; and scarce had the busy whispers of report circulated the surprise and seizure of the banditti, when, self-convicted, dreading pursuit, and picturing in every copse a foe, Montbelliard absconded from his villa, and eager to ensure his safety by a removal from France, fled to the nearest seaport, for the purpose of embarking for some foreign land; but destruction, the sure, the inevitable result of villany, quick pursued, and snatched from him even the salutary aid of transient repentance. Scarce had the boat receded from the rocky coast—scarce had it reached the fast-moored vessel, when shouts, and quick succeeding signals from the shore, augured some new delay. Doubts arose,

save

save in the frenzied mind of Montbelliard; there, armed with power, were the emissaries of justice stationed, and already, in fancy, did he behold the chains which awaited to shackle, and the dungeon to receive him. Mercy held forth no gladsome ray, for mercy his own heart's atrocity had never shown. But when again the shouts more loud resounded, with maddened start he sprung to mount the vessel's towering side; but in his eager haste he missed his hold, and plunged amid the flood: the waves closed over him—the rope in vain was thrown—he rose no more. Alas! how lost that wretch, whose life, with hydra fears, guilt peoples, whose future years, from the reflective past, wears but the thick, the impervious gloom of dire dismay, and appalling retribution! Montbelliard,

stung by the goading spur of conscience, through the chance or accidental detention of a passenger, fled from imagined pursuit, and to escape the ignominy of a scaffold, became at once the instrument of his own destruction.

But no more—Heaven rest the guilty! a gayer scene awaits our efforts, and to other characters be our obeisance paid. We will not attend the steps of the aged father Betsolin to the virtuous retirement of his cloister, neither will we linger o'er the death and struggles of the penitent Lamballe; but simply stating that the guilt-stained soul, in the convulsive throes of dissolution, received from the hands of true piety the balm of extreme unction, and fled in the assurance and firm hope of future mercy, repair with our hero 'midst the Pyrenean wilds, to

sojourn

sojourn once more at the long-neglected castle de Vermandois. Painful was the office; but never had his soul shrunk from what firm duty whispered—it was to descend amid the vaults—it was to visit the unconsecrated grave of a murdered mother, embalmed in the tears of filial tenderness, to remove her *manes* to the silent resting-place of her ancestors.

In vain Louisine urged her wish to share the trial; Vermandois was not to be shaken: the alleviating attendance of friendship was alone admitted; and leaving his sister at Lurenville Abbey, accompanied by the marquis, the count de Montelioné, Du Plessis, and the necessary attendants, he quitted Perpignan. Ineffectual were the exertions of cheerfulness; the sad, the melancholy mission sufficed to depress the spirits of the duke;

every league drew him nearer to the scene of a parent's sufferings, and every well-known turn recalled to mind the hours long past. They ascended the mountain-steeps—they penetrated the dreary pine forest—"Ill-fated parents!" faltered Vermandois, as he first distinguished the lone turrets of the castle; "murdered in the moments of security—betrayed where treachery was unlooked-for!"

"True," said the marquis; "yet if beatified spirits ere view the passing shadows of this world—ere read the hearts of men, and trace each secret end of action, then be the sainted parents you deplore blessed—past encrease blessed in the prosperity—but doubly, doubly blessed in the tried virtues of their offspring!"

Vermandois forced a smile; but a tear

quick

quick succeeded—it was the lawful tribute to his feelings, for the east front of the castle was in view; and though a shuddering sigh marked the recognition, yet did his eyes seek out the high casements opening to the stone gallery.

No more did the distant echoes vibrate the horn's shrill sound, no more did the frown of defiance scowl on the features of the porter: the reign of terror was past; and the drawbridge lowered by the servant entrusted with the castle's care. The carriage rumbled over it, and paused in the court-yard.

Theodore, now duke de Vermandois, bowed in silent acknowledgment to the congratulations of his friends. It was his first entrance beneath the known roof of his ancestors; yet did his heart feel no exultation: the ostentatious pride of greatness was valueless, for from the meek

hu-

humility of his youth's instructor, he had learned the true estimate of man's possessions—he had learned that the world was full of snares—that life was little better than illusion. But if in wandering through the deserted chambers his feelings warred against composure, so also did the aged Du Plessis: years had elapsed since, guarding the infant Louisine, he had escaped the scene of carnage—since the daggers of a hired band, violating every law of humanity, had, with infernal aim, sought the extermination of an unoffending race—since, through the dire plottings of ambition, gold had paved the way, and necessity had lent a pliant instrument; yet did the memorable night appear as yesterday—yet did the din of horror ring in his ear, as memory, in faithful accuracy, lingered o'er the past.

Led by the written direction of the departed Lamballe, the duke de Vermandois attended to the unmarked grave of his murdered mother. The earth was carefully removed, and, as the wretched penitent had confessed, the skeleton body was discovered, rudely thrust into a sack. Every necessary arrangement being completed, the remains of the unfortunate duchess were conveyed, in solemn state, from the castle de Vermandois, and deposited by the side of her alike unfortunate partner.

This sad duty performed, the party remained but to order the requisite repairs and alterations of the castle, in which, as the hereditary domain, and the once-chosen retirement of his father, the duke intended to reside. Its solitary wildness, its lone and unconnected situation, excited neither apprehension or dislike.

dislike. Accustomed to a confined circle, his world consisted in a few select friends, in the pleasing intercourse of the heart, in that uncontrouled exchange of sentiment,

"Thought meeting thought, and will preventing will;"

his world was in the free exercise of virtue—in the discharge of his several duties—in the philanthropy of unlimited benevolence—in all those divine emanations, those glowing attributes of soul, which linking the strong chain of unanimity, bind man to man.

Grateful was the smile which hailed their expected return to Lurenville Abbey; it was to each, for each, the double smile of love and sisterly affection; it was the cherub smile of hope, tempered with modesty and meek-eyed diffidence; yet did it give place to the spontaneous tear

of

of commiseration, when listening to the recital of their journey—when Louisine, glancing at her sable habit, mused o'er the sorrows of her sainted mother, and sighed at her untimely fate. Sad, yet salutary was the lesson conveyed; it showed the insufficiency of wealth, of titled greatness, to ward off the arrows of calamity; it showed that man alike is subject to the chilling blast of woe, and that treachery, that "hypocrisy, invisible except to God alone," for hidden and unknown ends, is oft permitted to reign a very despot o'er the world.

Led by that coincidence of taste which fondly loves to range 'midst haunts eternalized on memory, from visiting the altered aspect of the castle de Vermandois, whose rough and time-worn features had, by the chisel of improvement, been softened

softened into order, the party extended their route to the monastery of Bena Copia. The duke wished to recall to the mind of the honest wood cutter the humble missionary Theodore, who had once shared the shelter of his roof, and the genial warmth of his hospitality; he wished to impress some lasting token of his gratitude, to reward the native flow of benevolence.

The evening was calm, and the breeze scarce waved the towering cork-trees, when pausing on the summit of the hill, he beheld once more the verdant vale and the picturesque cottage of Javotte. Often had he stood upon the self-same spot—often had he gazed upon creation, and murmured at a doom, which seemed for ever to exclude him the participation of bliss, the domestic flow of confidence

—"Pardon

—"Pardon me, Heaven!" he aspirated; and then he smiled, for the inquiring eyes of Juliette were fixed upon him.

"For what secret transgression," she demanded, "is this appeal directed?"

"For the errors of a heart," replied Vermandois, "once dead to gratitude and hope. When sojourning within yon cottage," pointing to Antoine's—"when impressed with the angel form of the sister Monique's officiating attendant, fate, scoffing at presumption, seemed to affix an impenetrable barrier to the wild, the ungovernable flights of love. Ah, Juliette!" and tenderly he bowed upon the snow-white hand of his companion, "then estranged, unknown, unportioned, the very sigh of passion seemed as an insult to the noble, the unclouded prospects of your birth, and your expectations."

"But

"But for you," said Juliette, her cheek glowing with the rich tint of gratitude, and her dark eyes bending beneath the ardent gaze of her lover's, "but for you, when ensnared by treachery, when subdued by numbers, when enslaved by banditti, of what avail had been the boasted pride of *birth*—that unclouded dawn of *expectation*? Theodore," and sweetly she smiled upon the gratified Vermandois, "for as Theodore did my heart receive the lasting stamp of eternal devotion, virtue, generosity, is the true essence of greatness—is the noblest distinction of man. Honours are hereditary; but honour, free, unconfined, harbours in obscurity, and stamps a peasant oft superior to a prince!"

"From affection alone be traced the meed of praise," replied Vermandois: "'tis education, and the early counsels of

of truth, which stamps the bias of the mind, and arms it with the strong, the undying charm of rectitude and principle. Yes, Juliette, to the principles of my youth's instructor, be every good ascribed: Heaven, smiling on my orphan state, gave me to the care of father Betsolin, and to have swerved from his unerring rule of right, would have been to have warred against virtue."

"Is there no merit in the exercise of duty then?" asked Juliette. Vermandois hesitated, for he felt that his heart had often claimed merit in the renunciation of bliss—"Say," continued the inquisitor, pointing to the ebony cross she had yielded to his solicitation, and which still pended from his neck, "was there no merit in foregoing the incitements of the heart, the warmth of importunity?"

"No," eagerly rejoined the duke, raising

raising the little emblem to his lips; "as a true disciple of this great, this first duty, I returned to the castle, but to convert, but to save."

"Had you yielded to our wish—had you renounced the painful trial," demanded Juliette, "what then?"

"Why then," said Vermandois, "I should have been unworthy the bliss I now enjoy; then I should have proved myself an apostate to the pious trust of religion, a rebel to the ordination of Nature; for Montauban, as my supposed father, held a claim, whose violation had stamped eternal reproach——"

He paused; for they had nearly reached the cottage, and seeing Antoine descending into the valley, turned to await him—"Still toiling?" asked Vermandois, as Antoine bowed beneath his faggot load. "Exercise ensures health, my worthy

thy friend, and content sweetens labour."

Antoine gazed doubtfully for a moment; then dropping his burden, snatched the arm of our hero—"By St. Mary! the same—'tis our guest—'tis Theodore! What come upon another mission?" and then, marking the arch smile which played o'er the features of Juliette, he paused.

"I am come on the mission of gratitude," said the duke, cordially shaking his sun-burnt hand; "I am come to make you happy—to give you Javotte."

"Ah! but you are too late, monsieur," laughingly replied Antoine; "father Baptist has already performed that office; and Heaven," throwing open the door of his humble cabin, "has multiplied our blessings. See!" and exultingly he pointed to the group which presented itself—Javotte, the rosy emblem of health nurturing her infant, and seated by the side

side of the venerable author of his being.

Content, happiness, peace, crowned the labours of the honest rustic; he had no wish ungratified, for his every wish was innocent: to toil for the beings he loved, to receive in a smile the sweet recompence of those toils, was the ultimate end of his hopes, was the ensurer of his felicity. Ah, happy, thrice happy station, in which the mind, uncramped, uninfluenced by the pernicious customs of the world, retains all its primeval simplicity, in which the heart, unvitiated, unassailed by the poisonous infatuation of false pleasure, seeks for peace in the unerring path of nature and of moderation!

"Ah, monsieur!—monseigneur," faltered out Antoine, who, with wonder and dismay, listened to the freaks of Fortune, "you are far too generous—far too

too noble. Our wants are few, and health and strength——" hesitating—" 'Twas but a common act to give shelter to the destitute; and you——"

"Not as a recompence—not as a reward, my friend," interrupted Vermandois, "but as a token of my regard. Youth will pass away; health and strength may fail; but the record of a good action is eternal; accept my offers of service—I would but give you competence; follow your own track of bliss, nor need I whisper succour to the unfortunate."

Crowned with the prayers, the blessings of the cottagers, Vermandois and Juliette quitted the valley, rich in the internal, the heartfelt satisfaction of having bestowed happiness, of having rewarded merit.

Early the following morning, ere yet the dappled east reflected the sun's bright

beams, or Nature, rising from the lap of slumber, chanted the awakening matin of her praise, the marquis de Lurenville and his party, bidding adieu to the lady abbess, and the holy sisterhood, returned into Roussillon.

The months of mourning had imperceptibly worn away; and the memory of a murdered mother no longer claiming the sacrifice of appearance, Love resumed his wonted empire—Love pined to substantiate his claims. Parental approbation seconded alike the wishes of Vermandois and Montelioné; and quick did the busy ardour of preparation announce the approach of a double union. All was harmony, all was concord: the marquis internally blessed the escape of Juliette; and the marchioness, Louisine, Du Plessis, all bore evidence of peace.

One alone was wanting—Vermandois

eyed

eyed the group, and thought of the absent father Betsolin—"Yes, from thy hands, from thy hands alone must I receive my happiness," he exclaimed; and instantly he formed the design of visiting the monastery of Valombre, of imploring the officiating offices of his preceptor. 'Twas his counsels which had instilled the early rudiments of virtue—'twas his experience which had armed his mind against the inroads of error—'twas his example which had coloured the native play of his actions—be it then the same power to stamp the dye of his destiny.

High throbbed his heart as the gates of Valombre shut out the prospect—as his ear caught the eager gratulations of interest and regard—as his eye wandered o'er the well-remembered features of his earliest friends—as every haunt, endeared by memory, broke upon his view—as the

arr

arms of his revered preceptor expanded to receive him.

"Be it so," replied father Betsolin, as, with thankful joy, he listened to the eager hopes of his ever-loved charge; "I will petition our holy superior—I will quit once more my retirement—I will return with you to Lurenville Abbey, and enrich your union with the altar's blissful sanction; then for the last—last time, I bid adieu to the world; then I hasten hither, to pray for the continuation of your happiness—for the perpetuity of your virtue!"

THE END.

Printed by Lane, Darling, & Co. Leadenhall-street, London.