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CONFESSIONAL OF VALOMBRE.



A ROMANCE.

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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. II.



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THE

Confessional of Valombre.

CHAP. I.

Far from men,

Half cover'd by ancient pines from the wind,

A lonely pile exalts its head; long

Shaken by the storms of the north. OSSIAN.

.....

Remorse and pity

Are strangers to *our* hearts. Where'er they plead

We're adamant: weeping *we* never knew;

Nature has form'd *us* rough; and since stern Fortune

Denies *us* her best blessing (power and riches)

We wage eternal war with their possessors.

MARSH.

FROM the immense moat by which
the outworks of the building were sur-
rounded,

VOL. II.

B

rounded, it appeared to the eager eyes of Theodore more the bulwark of strength, than the sacred retreat of pious fervour; more the hostile symbol of resistance, than the meek emblem of zealous faith. Irregular were its juttings; turreted battlements rose at every angle, and thick and heavy walls, black from the rust of time, towered, the bold supporters of its ramparts. Oft had the trumpet's shrill charge sounded the din of battle; oft, from the loopholes of its strength, had the blasts of death been levelled: tumult and confusion had echoed within its boundaries, ruin and desolation had marked the havoc of its frowns; yet now, did it hold forth a sanctuary, now did it smile the promise of repose.

Theodore stood irresolute; all access into the castle was barred, for the draw-
bridge

bridge was up, and the moat was too deep to be forded. The haven of rest was before him, but the pass to its attainment inaccessible.

Alas ! how often does life pourtray the same picture ! how often, in the eager completion of our hopes, when fancy almost grasps the gilded phantom, does some new obstacle, some undreamed-of barrier, obstruct the promised joy, and freeze the zest of bliss !

Theodore, whose wistful eyes had measured each angle of the castle, drooping with the languor of disappointment, was about to turn from its inhospitable walls, when a light flashing from a casement in one of its towers, convinced him it was not entirely deserted — “ Compassion will plead my cause,” he exclaimed, springing towards the tower, and then,

tottering upon the very brink of the moat, he hallooed with more than wonted strength.

The casement was thrown open, and a voice demanded what he required ?

““ Shelter,” replied the youth. “ Stranger, I have strayed from the right path, and have no guide to direct me.”

“ Are you alone ?” questioned the voice.

“ Yes, unattended, and unarmed,” answered Theodore, entering at once into his suspicions.

The man eyed him attentively for a moment, then resumed—“ Stay, and I will lower the drawbridge.” The casement was reclosed, and the man disappeared.

Immediately after, the same clanking of chains, which had before roused Theodore from abstraction, marked the lowering

ering of the drawbridge ; and the massy gate of the castle being thrown open, disclosed the gigantic form of the inviter. A sensation, if not of fear, yet of suspicious caution, checked the eager haste of our hero. It is true, he had nothing to lose ; but yet the dark scowl of malignant scrutiny, which succeeded his expressions of gratitude, spoke more than common import.

“ You are a young traveller,” said the man, as he reclosed the gate, and hung the key upon his girdle. “ By the mass ! you look as though the breath of heaven would blast your freshness.”

“ The looks are not always conclusive,” boldly remarked Theodore.

“ Else,” said his host, “ you had not tempted the hardships of these wilds. Come on, my youthful hero, don't

linger; you craved a shelter, and you shall find one."

"Better have trusted to the shelter of the forest," thought Theodore, following across an immense court-yard, and entering a long piazza, leading to the interior of the castle.

"'Tis a solitary habitation," said the man, stooping to regain the lamp he had left at the entrance of the passage.

"Are you its sole inhabitant?" demanded Theodore.

The stranger eyed him for a moment; then, with a significant smile, answered—"Come on, and I will introduce you to my companions."

The passages through which they passed were long and intricate, winding in mazy labyrinths, and lined with the damp mildew of neglect—"Here is plenty of space,"

space," observed the man, pausing at the entrance of an immense hall, and extending high the lamp.

An involuntary awe bleached the features of Theodore; his heart fluttered with unknown emotion, and a tear trembled in his eye—"Who owns this castle?" he demanded, minutely examining the heavy range of pillars which supported the ponderous roof. "Alas! what pity is it to see the devastation of time courted by the apathy of neglect!"

"I reside in this castle," said the man, smiling ironically; "nor would its lord venture to dispute our privilege."

"*Our!*" eagerly repeated Theodore, and then he paused; for he saw, by the lowering contraction of the stranger's brow, that the questions of curiosity were offensive. A long dark passage opened

from the extremity of the hall; it was narrow, and arched. Theodore silently followed his guide; but, ere he had proceeded many paces, he started. Horror and amazement filled his mind; rooted to the spot, he listened; for the blast of a horn, shrill and piercing, echoed along the passage. It was such as had ever marked the approach of the mysterious stranger in the garden of Valombre. "Jesu Maria!" trembled on the lips of Theodore; and then again was he awakened to exertion, for the harsh voice of his conductor impelled him forward.

The light flashed faintly. A sharp angle in the passage had hid the man from sight; and as Theodore paused, irresolute whether to proceed, or whether to retrace his steps, and seek an escape from the castle, a form swiftly glided past him.

He

CONFESSORIAL OF VALOMBRE.

He could trace the outline, but the noiseless step marked not the intruder; swift as thought it had fled, and now was lost in darkness. Theodore numbered the beads of his rosary; but scarce had his lips concluded an Ave Maria, when a low, whispering voice, pronounced — “Murder!” and a deep and broken sigh succeeded. Whether to conjecture it a warning of his own fate, he knew not; yet the peculiarity of his situation, in league with the suspicious appearance of the man into whose power he had so incautiously fallen, warranted the conclusion — “Who are you,” he demanded, “who in such mournful accents breathe sounds so threatening?”

“Be wary,” softly replied the voice; and then again it ceased; for the lambent

flame of the lamp, flashing in distance, marked the return of the man. He advanced but slowly; then extending the light, looked with fear and caution into the passage.

"I am here," said Theodore, in answer to his loud halloo; and then, muttering an oath, the man bid him follow. Theodore, in silence, complied; for he found resistance would but court the fate which appeared already to await him. That he had fallen into the snare of banditti, he could no longer doubt; but in whose bosom he had awakened commiseration, and why he should be so mysteriously forewarned of his danger, he had yet to discover. To be deprived of life, almost in the moment when its anticipations had received a new colour; when love, fanning the embers

embers of hope, gilded the fairy visions of futurity, and stamped the past years of existence but a prelude to coming bliss, saddened every feeling of his soul, damped every energy of his nature. To die without confessing the tale of enthrallment, without breathing the sigh of adoration, to expire with the name of Juliette upon his lips, and the idol image in his heart; to fall by the merciless hand of an assassin, in the ignoble bondage of slavery—"Oh God!" he aspirated, and then again he shuddered; for his guide, turning fiercely round, demanded what he saw?

"What should I see?" questioned Theodore, "save our own reflecting shadows? The flame of the lamp——"

"Boy, what did you hear?" interrupted the surly guide.

“ Naught but the echo of our own footsteps,” replied our hero.

“ Come on then,” muttered the stranger, and then he opened a door leading into a long range of chambers; but paused at the entrance; for a voice, loud and inharmonious, demanded, “ Who passed?”

“ ’Tis I, *Randolphe*,” exclaimed the guide.

“ Came you through the passage leading from the western hall?” asked the inquisitor.

“ Yes, from the western hall.”

“ And alone?”

“ No; a stranger youth here, who craved shelter for the night.”

“ But the passage, *Randolphe*; say, what met you in the passage?”

“ Nothing appeared to meet, and yet something

something passed me, for I felt the gathering current of air, as with noiseless steps it fled."

"Could you not see the form?"

"What form? Gaspard, you are a boy, and scare yourself with idle shadows."

"A boy!" muttered the half-offended Gaspard; "shadows may scare, but substance find me man. I can dare death in the onset's heat; but this ghost, this devil——"

"*Scares the mind of guilt,*" said a voice, "*and stamps the sinner coward.*"

Randolph and Gaspard, with vacant stare, gazed on each other; while Theodore, cased in innocence's adamant breastplate, boldly reentered the passage. Darkness was spread around; yet did his dauntless step brave the mystic maze;
yet

yet were his arms extended to intercept the intruder. Scarce had his eyes lost sight of the lamp's reflecting rays, scarce had his form mingled with surrounding darkness, when a low, rustling sound, checking almost the impulse to breathe, rooted him in the attitude of listening attention. Theodore's heart fluttered, not with fear, but with expectation; a religious awe, a pious inspiration, stole upon his faculties, and cased them in the resistless armour of fortitude.

A footstep softly sounded, and then the rustling, and then the footstep alike ceased. "Mysterious being," said the undaunted youth, "who, shrouded beneath the shadow of night, plays on the sickly brain of guilty weakness, know, that the mighty Power, whose unerring hand led me unarmed within these walls,
now,

now, with unshrinking firmness, nerves my mind, in bold defiance of these seeming horrors."

He ceased. The sound of approaching footsteps again broke the stillness; they seemed to advance within a few paces, and then all became hushed—"Be wary, be wary, be wary," thrice repeated the voice that had before warned him, and then distinctly it whispered—"Blood seals the compact of secrecy."

"Blood! secrecy!" echoed Théodore; "all-seeing Heaven!" for the mysterious controuler of his actions arose to his mind, filling him with horror and dismay, "point out the danger," in accents of imploring fervour, "and teach me to avoid the snare."

"You are entangled," softly replied
the

the voice; "ensnared, entrapped. Listen, for murder is——"

It ceased; a door slammed violently, and the noisy bustle of approaching numbers deadened every lesser sound.

Theodore, unarmed, defenceless, continued leaning against the damp, cold wall of the passage; his mind actuated by that firm, unbending courage, which neither courts danger, or shrinks at its approach, and his eyes fixed on the coming light, which marked the approach of the banditti.

Loud and discordant were the voices, blasphemous and profane the debate—"You are a hero, truly," exclaimed one, with a laugh of jocose irony. "Why, Leonard, if your hand had been alike nervous in the forest, the blow would have

have been less sure. Was it indeed the devil? or did it only borrow the devil's semblance?"

" 'Tis no matter," angrily muttered Leonard; " if the devil lights among our troop, you'll find no quarter."

Theodore shuddered with horror. The light reflected on his figure, yet he moved not; nor even when a loud shout betrayed discovery—when unsheathed weapons pointed at his breast, did he weakly supplicate for mercy: 'twas the moment of fate; but 'tis life which clothes death in terrors. Theodore feared not the future, because he shrunk not from the past; no temptations had lured him from rectitude, had violated the blessed calm of self-assurance. A pious aspiration trembled on his lips, as the seraph smile of resignation evinced his thoughts

thoughts had fled to heaven.—“Forbear,” exclaimed a voice, in the authoritative accents of command.

Instantly, as though by magic-spell, the shining blades were sheathed, and the murmur of surprise filled the pause of submission.

“Protect his life,” resumed the chief, “and be your charge his safety.”

Theodore started. The sounds were familiar to his ear. He looked doubtfully towards the speaker, but naught could he distinguish, save the dark outline of his figure, as quickly he receded down the passage. Not a moment was left to conjecture—was left to inquiry. Theodore was hurried forward, through intricate passages and neglected chambers, robbed of their panoply of state, and black with the mantle of unsocial night.

night. His guards spoke not, but the fierce, unbending scowl of curiosity marked their narrow observation. Resistance was vain ; obedient, passive, he ascended a flight of spiral stairs, nor shrunk at the darkened chamber into which ferocity and power forced him. He heard the harsh bolts grate forth the knell of freedom ; he heard the echo of retreating footsteps ; they ceased, they died away ; his own sighs filled the pause, and his own thoughts peopled the gloom. Gratitude, in the form of father Betsolin ; Love, in the angel image of the sister Monique's officiating attendant.

Unmarked, save by the pang of crude reflection, the hours glided, and night, with slow, unvaried revolution, yielded her reins to day. Gradual was the burst of glory ; Theodore watched its bright ascent,

ascent, even from the faint grey glimmer of morning, and saw, through the grated bars of his prison, the misty vapours rolling over the coned peaks of the mountains.

Often, in the garden of Valombre, had he listened to the matin hymn of awakening creation, when the rude melodies of morn, in grateful tribute, poured to nature's God the incense sweet of praise! Often, there, had he mused over the calm monotony of existence, and sighed, without knowing why, at the profound obscurity of his own destiny! Lost in thought, musing over the chequered contrast of past and present; then, content with negative calm and joyless apathy, living in the redundant exercise of infliction, and smiling at the abstruse documents of faith, alive but to the call
of

of devotion, and emulous but to the example of forbearance, now bursting anew into life—for what is existence, stamped with the languor of inanity?—his hopes, his thoughts, his wishes, all glowing with the fairy tints of anticipation, all guised in the magic garb of bliss; every energy of his soul wrapt in the exuberant flights of fancy, every impulse of his nature tranced by the rosy wand of youthful passion, his eyes wandered from the window, but not in peering scrutiny; quickly they scanned the mingled outline of the scene, nor paused in wonder, nor dwelt in admiration. It was the affianced bride of age, the lady Juliette, who skimmed along the mountain's top, lingering over rock and forest, softening the cataract's loud roar, and robbing even heaven's bright rays of half their splendour; for

Fancy,

Fancy, uncurb'd, love's soft illusions paint,
And e'en at distance scoffs.

Suddenly he started—suddenly the vision fled; his features saddened into dire expectancy; for a foot-fall in the passage recalled the conviction of his own captivity — “ Perhaps to murder ! ” thought Theodore, shrinking from the turret-window, and listening in all the agony of suspense.

The footsteps ceased, and then a low whispering succeeded; and then, in the warmth of argument, the caution of secrecy vanished, and the voices swelled into louder cadence.

“ He talked as though, subservient to his nod, our hold could boast no firmer claim than his authority; nay, said his frown could banish us the shelter of these walls.”

“ Talked ! ”

“Talked!” with an ironical laugh, was the response; “weak fool, he dare not; his threats are vain; for o’er his head I hold an iron rod, which blasts his courage. I tell you, Bernardine, the child, who wanton holds his fluttering prisoner by a silken string, boasts not a greater power.”

“Why should this power be hid from your long-tried colleagues?” demanded Bernardine. “Surely the pledge of faith, so long preserved, merits unbroken confidence. Should Fortune frown upon the eager strides of your high courage, this secret told ensures us safety; but, dying with you, drives us with coward caution from Vermandois’ walls.”

“Why, then, the cavern be a sure asylum. Buried in the earth’s deep bowels, who can the secret spring disclose?”

“Vermandois,” muttered Bernardine;

“he

“ he knows each hidden pass, and, armed with hellish hatred, may on our fortress dart.”

“ Then be his life your surety.”

“ His life !” repeated Bernardine, and fiend-like was his pause ; then suddenly resuming—“ Your hand, your hand, brave Montauban ; blood be the register of our security !”

“ Blood ! blood ! and life !” repeated Montauban, “ but not whilst I can wield this sword. Mark me, Bernardine ; ’tis when chance, aimed by some giant strength, shall lay me low, that your sure dagger’s point must seal his lips. Lure him hither ; tell him some beauty courts his warm embrace ; and when once here—you know the rest. These walls can tell no tales, nor can the dead rise up in accusation. Now go you to the council-hall ;

hall; I'll forthwith follow; and bid Randolphe prepare to guide our prisoner hence."

"Why so careful of this youth?" demanded Barnardine; "why, when our swords were raised to silence the bold intruder, did you so firmly check our just revenge? Our secret cannot be safe, when prying eyes have pierced our sanctuary, and numbered e'en our strength."

"Question me not. This youth, this boy, this foundling of Valombre"—Theodore listened; Theodore could scarcely breathe—"unknowing, owns a firm, undying claim. More precious than our lives be his safety. Fly, Barnardine; henceforth the pledge of secret faith shall stamp him ours. Fly, fly, and speed the steps of Randolphe; till safe within,

his cloister-prison, nor enterprise nor glory be our care."

"First own the secret tie," said the reluctant Barnardine; "explain why souls like ours, bold, unshrinking, daring, must to this unknown boy submissive yield? Tell us——"

"No more," interrupted Montauban; "my wish alone must give the mandate force. Go, send Randolphe hither; then wait me in the council-hall."

The steps of Barnardine had scarce ceased reverberating, when the harsh bars of detention were withdrawn; and Theodore, watching the opening door, recognised, in the gigantic figure of the intruder, the being who had so frequently, and so mysteriously pierced the sacred seclusion of Valombre's monastery.

tery. The palsied start of amazement, and the high flush of indignant horror, gave evidence of his feelings. The conversation he had just heard, the warning he had received in the passage, together with the threatened murder of his preceptor, father Betsolin, all rushed upon memory, and filled him with dismay and doubt. Why his own life should be so carefully preserved, he knew not; and why the enterprise and glory of a ruffian band should wait upon his safety, watching the progress of his every action, nay, instigating his line of conduct, and authoritatively claiming the guidance of his future life, he could not determine. He stood, his eyes rivetted on the intruder, and his heart sickening at the necessity of acquiescence.

“Why so thoughtful?” demanded

c 2

Montauban;

Montauban; "the threat of life is passed, and gratitude should mark the favour felt."

"*Gratitude!*" repeated Theodore, in the energy of his feelings, "gratitude for what? for the vile privilege to breathe, tied down in bondage to your tyrant rod."

"Beware, rash boy: patience is a short-lived virtue, and best lays claim to pious dotage. The time will come, when even you will doff the badge of saint, and smile at past fanaticism. Come, boy, confess which suits your ardour best, the trumpet's clarion, or the monk's dull whine."

"My ardour glows in the award of virtue," replied Theodore; "and my soul pants to trace the tract of rectitude and honour. Give me but liberty to quit
these

these walls, restore me to my youth's blest guardian, from my actions take the vile restraint of your authority, and, from the sacred candour of unimpeached veracity, securely rest, that time, nor chance, nor fate, nor power, shall e'er the fatal secret glean of our mysterious compact."

Contemptuous was the smile which marked the features of Montauban—"Your life is in my hands, your fate, your being, all my own," he exclaimed; "and think you I'll forego the purchased right, and blast my deep designs? Go, idle dreamer! pursue the phantom Virtue; it is a ghostly search, and best belongs to frantic zealots. But remember, when called upon to action, you must the thralldom break, and own my high command."

“ Take back the purchase,” eagerly exclaimed Theodore; “ the pang of death is mercy from this accursed bondage. Think not I’ll shrink. Come on; behold me firm, prepared to meet the stroke that severs the coercion of self-assumed authority.”

“ *The monk Betsolin,*” muttered Montauban, pointing to the dagger in his girdle; “ ’tis there the aim’s most sure.”

Theodore shuddered, and the pallid hue of his features armed with new force the powers of torture.

“ ’Tis there,” pursued the bandit, “ that heroism dies, and yields the reins to Nature.”

“ Nature!” repeated the almost gasping Theodore; “ no, gratitude and mercy. Nature holds forth no smiling claim to lure the heart of orphan sorrow.”

“—Say

“ Say not orphan,” rejoined Montauban, fixing his eyes, in scrutinizing earnestness, on the varying expression of our hero’s countenance; “ a parent yet may claim the right of your obedience.”

“ A parent !” echoed Theodore; “ a parent! a parent’s arms enfold me! a parent’s love sustain me !”

“ A *father’s*,” ejaculated Montauban, grasping the arm of Theodore, and hurrying towards the door.

“ Stay yet a moment,” implored the youth, struggling for freedom. “ First lead me to the feet of him who can the tie proclaim. Interest—Nature will the election make, and bend me at his feet, a humble suppliant for his blessing. Tell me——”

“ Peace, boy,” interrupted the bandit,

starting at the entrance of Randolphe.

“Behold your guide: you must away, and leave to time and chance, and my concurrence, all hope of farther knowledge. Remember well your oath, and be, as heretofore, the signal of our intercourse preserved. Randolphe will guide you through the intricate passes of the forest, and then your path is straight. Remember the pledge of secrecy.”

“Marry!” muttered Randolphe, as the bandit descended the turret stairs, “I hate a fasting journey. What say you, boy? are you for braving the keen air of the mountains upon an empty stomach?”

“Let us away,” exclaimed Theodore, regardless of the question; “let us quit these walls; the very air is tainted; vice stalks unmasked, and tyranny reigns with unhal-

unhallowed latitude. Oh that I had never quitted Valombre ! that I had never seen——”

“ Pshaw, boy,” interrupted Randolphe, “ regret is but a shallow wind-up of a story ; 'tis like remorse, and that's a coward's virtue. Come, avaunt with care and sighing sadness ! Let's away, first to break our fast, and then to tramp the mountains. Marry ! I know each pass, and can scale the rocky heights, as though I'd trod the footings of a guide,”

Theodore silently followed from the turret ; his heart was sad, and bitter sounded the jocose ribaldry of Randolphe. His eyes wandered, in musing melancholy, o'er the deserted chambers through which they passed, for neglect had hung her mildew on the time-in-

crusted walls, and faded the scattered remnants of splendour.

“ Why, boy,” exclaimed Randolphe, laughing at the expression of thought he could not decipher, “ you look as gloomy as though you were ordinary confessor to a convent of penitents.”

“ Is it long,” demanded Theodore, unmindful of his remark, “ since this castle was deserted by its owners ?”

“ Who told you it was deserted ?” questioned Randolphe.

“ Observation,” replied the youth.

“ Observation has deceived wiser heads,” rejoined the robber. “ By the mass ! if you could see our revels, you would not ask if it was deserted.”

“ *By its owners ?*” again repeated Theodore.

“ We

"We are its owners, for we boast possession," said Randolphe; "and the devil must aid him who dare dispute our right. Peeping from their graves, methinks the old dons would stare," pointing to the full-length portraits which, in gilded frames, hung around the gallery, "to see the change. Why here, where they used to confess their sins, we drown ours," applying a huge key, and throwing open a folding-door. "Look ye, I am butler to the troop, and here we stow the grape's rich nectar."

"Impiety, profanation, sacrilege!" burst from the lips of Theodore, in beholding the stores of plunder, piled even on the dismantled altar of the chapel.

Randolphe laughed in derision, as he watched the eyes of Theodore, wander-

ing from the scriptural allusions which stained the high casements, to the defaced altarpiece, and the tattered remnants of its decorations. "Why, hoy," exclaimed the ruffian, "it is but the work of man."

"True," murmured the shuddering Theodore, "but it was dedicated to the worship of God."

"I query," rejoined Randolphe, "whether the holy brotherhood, with all their boasted forbearance, wouldn't absolve the sin to be made free of the privilege: Aye, aye, let them alone; they love the luxuries of the flesh, and compromise at will with the doctrines of the spirit. What say the monks of Valombre? Come, unbend, and say what you have seen besides praying?"

"I have

"I have seen," said Theodore, "what stamps on vice a die so black, as robs it almost of the reach of mercy."

"Aye, boy, what's that?" questioned the robber.

"Its contrast, *virtue*," firmly replied our hero, following once more into the gallery.

Theodore partook but sparingly of the rich profusion of plenty, nor did his lips touch the luscious nectar, sparkling from the flask. Impatient to snap the fetters of detention, to hail once more the privilege of enlargement, he awaited the conclusion of Randolphe's repast, and saw him drain the flaggon's dregs with pleasure, because it was an item of departure. His heart beat high as he recrossed the drawbridge; for, in his "mind's eye,"

eye," the calm serenity of his convent was already restored, the rough, ungentle sway of guilt had ceased to torture; for though his looks were fixed on the harsh features of the robber, his thoughts, his soul, had flown to the early sanctuary of his worship. Gradually the picture changed, and Juliette flashed on his mental vision in all her pristine beauty. Sweet was the smile which marked the heart's soft flight, tender the sigh which rose spontaneous to a first emotion!

"My orders are to conduct you through the forest," said *Randolphe*.

Theodore started. The voice, with gorgon power, annihilated the rosy spring of bliss, dissolving her fairy flights, crumbling her unsubstantial fabrics; reality's void returned, and

Mountains

Mountains tow'ring to the horizon's line,
Knew but the change of pine forests drear, and
Time-worn battlements.

“ To guard you in safety,” pursued the robber, “ nor to leave you till within the path you last night strayed from.”

“ Last night,” repeated Theodore, with a heavy sigh ; “ would I had tarried in the forest !”

“ Marry ! you have no right to complain of our treatment,” rejoined Randolphe. “ I should like to know,” gazing inquisitively in his face, “ who and what you can possibly be, to excite the interest of our chief. Come, disclose, my little hero,” grasping the arm of the youth ; “ where have you seen the noble Montauban ?”

“ I came a sojourner from Valombre's

monas-

monastery," replied Theodore; "the world I have seen has been upon these mountains."

"And yet you know Montauban?"

Theodore was silent.

"Come, hoy, confess," continued the robber, whom the contents of the flaggon had robbed of his taciturnity; "tell me why I am made your guide, and what you have done to excite the attention of our chief? Some daring enterprise, I warrant. By the mass! he has a noble spirit; brave as though he had ten lives to lose, instead of one. I have seen him attack the armed as well as the unwary, and hew his way in spite of danger and death. In the field, he would face the devil; but in the dark——"

"What of the dark?" eagerly interrupted

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ed Theodore, upon whose memory the mysterious voice in the passage flashed.

“ Why, in the dark,” resumed the loquacious Randolphe, nodding significantly, “ he is little better than a coward. I saw him once—but yonder is the boundary of my march. See, we have passed the forest, and the path lies straight before you.”

“ Stay yet a moment,” importuned Theodore, eager to elucidate the mystery ; “ say when and how you saw him a coward, Randolphe ?”

“ A coward—in the dark—mark that,” rejoined the robber. “ I saw him once rush through the passage, as though the devil had come to claim him, his features all convulsed, his eyes extended, and his very hair erect upon his head ; and when the clock in the council-hall told
one,

one, he hid his face, and madly called out *murder!*”

“ Jesu Maria! murder! did he call out murder?” demanded Theodore.

“ Aye, boy: but why should the sound bleach your cheeks, and palsy e’en your limbs?”

“ No matter,” faltered the youth. “ Proceed—what else did you see? what else did you hear?”

“ No more,” replied Randolphe: “ next morn we left Vermandois, and for three nights Montauban kept a guard within his chamber.”

“ Did it teach him mercy?” questioned Theodore, pausing on the verge of the forest.”

“ That your own safety can best resolve,” replied the robber.

Freed from the restraint of observation,

tion, Theodore, with gratitude, heard the retreating steps of Randolphe, and saw the darkening forest close upon his giant form ; he felt as one who, from the brink of danger, sees the path of peace and safety open ; as one who, tossed on seas, forlorn and joyless, hails the blest harbinger of his sanguine hopes. Elated, grateful, he breathed his fervent thanks to Heaven ; and then, with tread as light as mountain-goat, or playful doe, brushed swiftly o'er the thymmy herbage.

Unmarked by accident, or the lingering protraction of delay, save the chance stoppages for repose, Théodore, at length, beheld the turretted spires of Valombre, peering amid the age-rooted umbrage of embowering trees. The sun was slowly sinking, and the vesper hymn of nature flung her melting echoes to
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the breeze ; sweetly did they linger, now ceasing, now reviving, now dying in the soul-thrilling cadence of a last exertion.

He paused for a moment ; his eyes fixed on the agitated waves of the Garonne, and his feelings catching the sad infection which departing day diffuses—" Tomorrow thy glory will revive," he articulated, slowly moving towards the convent, and gazing from the perturbed waters to the last golden beam of splendour ; " to-morrow creation will smile beneath thy invigorating rays : but man boasts no awakening impulse ; the night closes on his labours, and the dawn finds him buoyed by fallacious hope, or writhing beneath the pang of disappointment. Oh, Nature ! Nature !" and fancy fled to Bena Copia and to Juliette, " why hast thou vested my soul with the sensitive

sitive throb of feeling, if thou withholdest ever the tender bliss of sympathetic intercourse ?”

He reached the gate ; the bell echoed to his pull ; the heavy bars were withdrawn ; it flew open ; he rushed across the court-yard ; he sought the presence of his friend ; and whilst the monks, with eager questions, muster around him, hailing his glad return, and loading on his head the pious offering of their blessings, be it my task to introduce to the notice of my readers, the lovely object who, at the profession of the sister Monique, in the chapel of the convent of Bena Copia, put to flight the stoicisms of our youthful missionary, and, in one moment, stamped him an apostate to his former credence.

CHAP. II.

Ambition! close art thou leagued with mis'ry;
 For thou dost poison peace, nay, e'en the spring
 Of hope, to realize thy aim. Not in
 The world alone be traced thy fearful strides;
 Enthron'd within the parent heart, freezing
 The stream of nature and of pity, thou
 Rifest all the sweets of early love!

PRIDE, man's deadly foe, the bane of peace, the never-slumbering engine of the soul's destruction, marked in youth's earliest dawn the actions of the marquis de Lurenville. He became a courtier, because distinction attends the smile of princes; he became a hero, because Fame spreads aloud the exploits of the brave; he became a husband, because splendour courted his acceptance: in every impulse, in every revolving period of existence, the phantom pursued, instigated,

ed,

ed, inspired him; he lived but for the exaltation of his name, he sighed but for the promotion of his honours. Prosperity smiled upon his steps, Fortune lavished the rich award of her favours. A son, the promising heir to his possessions, blessed his union; a daughter, fair as Mahomet's fabled houris, held forth the lure of speculative aggrandizement. He was a husband, yet was he a stranger to the tender transports of conubial sympathy, to the dear, the matchless intercourse of mutual conciliation: he was a father, yet was he a stranger to the anxious, sensitive, thrilling emotions which fill a father's soul—to the mingled sensations of hope and apprehension, whose eternal warfare stamps the preeminence alike doubtful. Hurried away by the darling charm of ambition, which,
like

like a fiery meteor, dazzles the eyes of adventurous perseverance, nature's prerogative of feeling became annihilated, and beneficence and philanthropy were but lesser springs in the great wheel of action. He was suspicious where honour's sacred rule was threatened; yet was he open to the snares of the crafty, yet was he subtle and persevering in the performance of his projects. Piety held no rein to check the strides of human frailty, for the marquis was too much a man of the world to suppose religion necessary to the soul, when health organized the active energies of the body. The partner whom destiny had given him was happy in the sphere of submission, because she possessed that softness, that pliability of disposition, which, yielding to the pressure of circumstances,

cumstances, gradually converts habit into nature. The meek conveyancer of princely wealth, her virgin heart yielded to the blandishments of professed adoration; and she accompanied the marquis to the altar, untingured by one repining sigh—uninfluenced by one sordid motive. Bigoted to the tenets of her persuasion, her greatest sorrow originated in the apostacy of her lord: at times she had ventured to implore, nay, strengthened by the arguments of her confessor, even to admonish; but her zeal ever awakened the casual smile of contempt, or aroused the shaft of jocosé satire. Devoted to her children, and striving to hide them from the dangerous infection of example, she doomed her heart to the painful privation of her daughter's society; and prevailing on the marquis to

coincide with her wishes for education, placed the lady Juliette at the convent of Bena Copia. She knew the abbess, she knew the nuns ; for she herself had gleaned the rudiments of knowledge in the same cloister.

The count de Montelioné, four years the senior of his sister, rich in the culture of abstruse science, and polished in the circles of refined life, had already, beneath the banner of his sovereign, signalized himself in the field. Brave, even to the verge of rashness, animated with the patriotic fire of almost Roman enthusiasm, proud of the virtues more than the dignity of his ancestors, actuated by the love of freedom, alive to the slightest shadow of oppression, and espousing ever the cause of the oppressed, he had risen into manhood, with that fervour of
spirit,

spirit, that glowing energy of soul, which stamps a hero's characteristic. His figure was of that proportion towering into majesty, which the artist covets in his delineation of an Apollo; his eyes were blue, yet they possessed all the fire of intelligence, softening into the languor of sensibility; his complexion fair, yet did each strongly-marked feature reflect the flash of mental genius. Early in the camp had he imbibed the patience of endurance, the un murmuring perseverance of true courage; a soldier, with all a soldier's glowing attributes—disinterested, benevolent, ingenuous, he marked and shuddered at the growth of that passion, which, subduing a father's softened feelings, threatened the overthrow of future peace. Not for himself, but for the being nature stamped a candidate for

love—for Juliette—for his sister, that sister, who, rich in expanding charms, whilst yet the playful dawn of infancy tinged with the fairy-finger of unclouded bliss the exuberance of fancy, had been affianced to a man whose years had numbered thrice her own, and whose advantages were summed up in his dukedom and his wealth.

The duke de Vermandois, the cotemporary of the marquis, the being ambition had fixed on for the husband of the lady Juliette, existed a proof that Nature, perhaps in sport, sometimes violates her own stamp of perfection, by affixing to man, the image of his Creator, the blackening dye of a corrupt heart. She had neither gifted him with external charms, or internal qualifications; for his features, the direct index to his mind,
bespoke

bespoke him proud, morose, unbending ; a slave to his passions, yielding ever to their wild controul, and violating every intruding barrier to ensure their gratification ; a sceptic in religion, he laughed at the denouncements of purgatory ; an apostate to true honour, he yet artfully guised his flagrant deviations under the mask, of worldly form. To the few upon whom fortune had lavished her favours, the wily softness of the courtier glossed over the coercion of authority ; to the thousands whom the iron rod of adversity had already levelled, mercy claimed no transient reign to check the strides of tyranny. No soft conciliation ere mourned the lapse of feeling, ere chased the tear of woe ; heavy was the yoke which vassalage imposed ; for

Fear check'd the curse whose birth oppression own'd.

In early youth the snakes of envy coiled around his heart, crushing the germ of moral virtue.

His father died. One step alone remained to intercept his hopes, and blast ambition's visions—that step a brother, gifted with health, with vigour, with discretion, with honour; not idly lavishing inheritance and fame in joyless dissipation, but labouring in the cabinet of state to erect the bulwark of his country's triumph; labouring to discharge the trust integrity imposed; labouring to add individual honour to the long, long list of his forefathers' virtues.

Vermandois traced the rising obstacles to splendour; he saw connubial bliss crown the transports of virtuous prepossession; he saw the dear, the treasured pledges of nature cement the bond of hallowed

hallowed love; he saw, and, like the demon of discord, breathed the heavy curse of hatred and malice.

But transient is the breath of life; the innocent instigators of that hatred, like the summer flowers, perishing beneath the lightning's blast, vanished from the face of day, leaving the ducal seat of his ancestors open to his ambition, and to his wishes. The world paid him homage; for man, blinded by the dross gold, forms, on the presumptive basis of his own conception, the standard of action. He was despised, but courted; hated, but endured; splendour solicited his alliance, and youth and beauty alike spread the soft blandishments of their smiles. The duke, alive to their fascination, revelled in the luxurious lap of pleasure, but preserved inviolate the

boasted privilege of liberty: a lover, without forging the chains of Hymen, he ranged in the wild latitude of his sensual nature, nor once paused in compassion, or relaxed in conscience.

But Juliette, the lovely origin of my dereliction! True, gentle reader, in delineating the character of the duke de Vermandois, I had forgotten I left my hero surrounded by the monks of Valombre, for the specified purpose of introducing to your notice the innocent author of the missionary's enthrallment, the gentle Juliette, who, as the officiating friend of the sister Monique, strewed the path to immolation with new-blown roses, little suspecting that, in the same moment, she planted in the devoted heart of our hero, the sharp, the corroding thorn of hopeless passion. Pardon then
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the exuberant flight of fancy, and patiently unfold the page, destined to launch her on the busy theatre of action.

CHAP. III.

Isometimes do believe, and sometimes do not ;

As those that fear, they hope, and know they fear.

SHAKESPEARE.

LIKE the golden seeds of harvest, sowed by the hand of industry, and nurtured in the earth's luxuriant bosom; example, once engendered, spreads, unfolds, expands, and crowns the labourer and the parent's toil. Such were the hopeful prognostics of the marchioness de Lurenville, as she taught the infant Juliette to lisp the credo, and murmur the avemaria ; such the anticipations of bigoted zeal, as she traced the brilliant eye of expectation,

pectation, fixed on the hoary visage of her soul's confessor.

"She will be a saint," whispered father Anselme, watching the glowing countenance of his benefactress.

"Grant it, Heaven!" aspirated the enthusiast; and then would she strain the wondering child to her bosom.

"Holy Mary! infuse thy sanctity," pursued the monk, "and gift this little candidate with heavenly grace."

The child smiled in playful dalliance, and the mother thought her already inspired.

"She will save the soul of her father! she will be a pious offering for his incredulity!" she would exclaim; and then, flying to her oratory, pour forth the fervent thanksgiving of her grateful heart.

"What if she become a nun?" questioned the confessor; "what if her soul,
elevated

elevated by divine inspiration, forswear the allurements of the world, and practise the forbearance of immaculate faith?"

" Ah ! but to part with her," faltered the alarmed mother ; " father, to forego the rich reward of all my pains, and all my trials."

" 'Tis for the salvation of her soul !" rejoined the confessor. " Lady, some sacrifice is due to virtue."

" True ; but I would fain retain the privilege of beholding her. Father, I would watch her growth, I would trace the gradual expansion of intellect. Tear her hence, and time effaces the powers of memory, and blots the tender record of her mother's care !"

" Ah, my daughter !" said the confessor, " how little do you estimate the powers of the soul ! Gratitude is its predominant

dominant sentiment—is the very essence of its being—is the first, the social, the tender tie nature implants; or why do we see the smile of recognition brighten the downy features of infancy? why do we see the first ray of reason emitted in the acknowledgment of a mother's care?"

" 'Tis in the acknowledgment of kindness," rejoined the marchioness, " the mother claims the awakening smile, because duty, affection, nature, cementing the tender bond, bends her in patient expectation o'er her precious charge: 'tis not the relative tie; for the hireling, whom indolence, fashion, or caprice substitutes, oft gleans the rich reward the parent heart should covet. Ah, father! a mother's fears give birth to a thousand, thousand sensations, which none else can picture."

" True,

“ True, lady,” replied the confessor :
“ far be it from me to limit the force of nature ; yet would those fears be less sensitive, the dangers less apparent, if screened from sensuality and temptation. Numberless are the snares laid to entrap the foot of beauty ; rank, riches, both alike combine to arm the tempter. Ah ! think how dazzling, how fallacious are the pleasures of the world ! think of the sophistry, the delusion of its pursuits, and shield the infant Juliette from a test so fatal ! Think of her innocence, think of the salvation of her yet unpoluted soul ! think of the apostasy of the marquis, and resign her to the sure security of never-slumbering zeal.”

“ Ah, father !” faltered the marchioness, “ never will my lord second the decision. Far other prospects, far other
hopes,

hopes, colour the ardour of ambition ; he pictures, through the medium of his children, the promotion of his honours—the aggrandizement of his name.”

The man of God meekly crossed his bosom, then, with a labouring sigh, rejoined—“ Dangerous anchor of reliance ! dangerous presumption of human pride and human error ! Alas ! how often does man mistake the road to happiness ! how often does he labour hard to attain the summit, whose close is misery ! ”

“ How can I resist the wishes of my husband ? ” demanded the marchioness. “ Speak, holy father ; instruct me how to act. Aid me with your pious doctrine ; teach my soul to combat or to yield.”

“ Obedience is the beaten track,” replied the confessor ; “ when the incentive

tive owns no criminal motive, to conquer to yield."

"As how, father?" eagerly demanded the marchioness.

"By conciliation, by entreaty," rejoined the monk. "Nature installs man the lord of the creation, but she arms woman with resistless weapons; man sways by authority, but woman enslaves the soul—woman rises triumphantly through the meek humility of submission."

The marchioness forced a smile of incredulity; then, with a heavy sigh, articulated—"There are dispositions——" and then thoughtfully she paused, fearful of casting the slightest shade of reprehension on the conduct of her lord.

"There are characters," observed the confessor, entering at once into her feelings,

ings, " who, guided by this world's rule, own no sway but interest, admit no incitement but ambition. Yet, daughter, the hour of conversion will arrive, and the prayers of piety will hasten the precious impulse. Unceasing be our orisons to check the dangerous prevalence of example, and to awaken the slumbering soul to the exercise of holiness."

But vain were the pious offerings of zeal—vain the ceaseless expiations of religion ; the marquis, buried in the abstraction of worldly pursuits, admitted no plea to rouse him from the toil. His study was the pinnacle of worldly greatness, and his hopes the passive submission of his family. He ridiculed the saintly raptures of the marchioness, but suffered her to indulge in all her pious inflictions, as it interfered not with his pursuits ;

pursuits; but the unguarded smile of contempt, the casual inuendo of incredulity, passed not in harmless inefficacy—died not in unnoticed oblivion.

The little Juliette, the stay, the hope of the marchioness's visionary enthusiasm—the imagined missionary of an hereafter calling, betrayed the seeds of scepticism, and awakened the horror of doubt; she neglected the lessons of the confessor, she shrunk from the restraints of devotion, nay, she broke the string of her rosary, and, with sacrilegious profanation, scattered the beads in idle sport.

“She will be denounced of Heaven,” exclaimed the confessor, gazing with dismay on the infant culprit.

The marchioness uttered a fearful shriek, and clasped her hands in shuddering forebodance.

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From this period, the long-projected plan of conventual education was revived, and Juliette was destined to the care of the holy mother of Bena Copia.

“ There the pernicious influence of example will be eradicated,” said the confessor, “ and the pure doctrine of faith restored.”

Hope chased the tears of maternal affection ; and the innate approbation of conscience, the never-slumbering incitements of duty, aided the eloquence of her appeal.

The marquis listened, for it threatened not the overthrow of his own schemes ; he acquiesced, for it held forth no prospect of future resistance : submission he knew to be the groundwork of faith, and obedience the great law of moral duty.

Thus guided by different motives, the
resig-

resignation was acceded to ; and Juliette, ere she had attained her seventh year, was removed from the parent roof, and consigned to the charge of the instructor of her mother's youth, the abbess of the convent of Bena Copia.

CHAP. IV.

O, what authority and show of truth
Can cunning sin cover itself withal !

SHAKESPEARE.

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She, like the tenant
Of some night-haunted ruin, bore an aspect
Of horror, worn to habitude.

MYSTERIOUS MOTHER.

So slight was the shade of apostasy, so
transient the prevalence of example, that
Juliette

Juliette forgot the tenor of her father's incredulity, and soon imbibed the enthusiasm of her instructors. Surrounded by the officiating members of faith, her every idea became tinctured; and when the marchioness de Lurenville, yielding to the urgent call of affection, visited the sacred retirement of her child, her every fear was banished, her every wish confirmed. Securely resting on the promises of the mother superior, she again bade her adieu, without one apprehension for the future, one regret for the past.

With an intellect comprehensive, with a mind ingenuous, with spirits uncurbed, Juliette progressively surmounted the labours of study, and imbibed the rich culture of education. Docile to the commands of her instructors, the playful frolic of youth obtruded not on the hours dedicated

dedicated to knowledge, neither did the gloom of cloistered sadness o'ercloud the season of cheerfulness. She listened to the philosophy of the aged, without imbibing the tincture of stoicism—to the trials of those whom affliction had driven for refuge to a cloister, without cherishing a disgust for the world. She knew her prospects in life wore a far different colour; she knew herself destined to fulfil the contract of ambition—destined to tread the path of grandeur—destined the bride of the duke de Vermandois; yet she felt no joy in the exaltation, no pride in the coming elevation: rather would she have remained within the walls of the monastery, rather have embraced the negative calm of religion. But duty urged obedience to a father's will, and aroused sensibility started no barrier;

barrier; her heart slumbered in calm security. She had heard of love, but she had never felt its power. The duke de Vermandois was little calculated to awaken its glowing energies; and save the duke de Vermandois, the marquis, the count de Montelioné, and the father confessor of Bena Copia, her knowledge extended not beyond the pious sisterhood. Regret ever mingled with her anticipation of a removal from the convent, because that removal was to be succeeded by her marriage. She looked forward to the moment of sacrifice with a gloomy foreboding, with a sadness which o'erclouded the serenity of the present, and spread a black, an indescribable dread o'er the future.

To her bosom-friend, the novice, sister Monique, she would dwell on her nameless

less terrors, envying her the coming hour of profession—"Your life will be so calm, so uninterrupted," she would say; "while I am combating, perhaps vainly, the world's innumerable evils, you will be quietly slumbering in the lap of religion and of peace."

"My sorrows are passed," replied Monique, wiping the tear which remembrance extorted; "at least the sorrows which the malice of man can inflict; but, though passed, they are not effaced. Juliette, yours has been a life of quiet; mine, alas! of agitation; you have known no uneasiness but what owes birth in the mind; I have felt the poisoned arrow of perfidy; I have been driven from the world, for its busy haunts yielded no safeguard against destruction."

"You!"

“ You ! ” exclaimed Juliette, gazing on the interesting countenance of the speaker ; “ you, so young, and so unfortunate.”

“ No, not unfortunate,” resumed the novice ; “ for I have escaped the snares of vice. Ah, Juliette ! the heart pleaded against me, yet did I resist her counsels ; Heaven aided me in the contest, and gave me strength to stem the sophistry of the deluder.”

“ And yet you fly for safety ? ” observed Juliette.

“ Yes, from myself,” eagerly rejoined Monique ; “ I fly beyond the possibility of recall, beyond the reach of temptation ; I fly from man ; I take refuge within this cloister, where, in the exercise of religion, in the calm of reflection,

tion, the remembrance of the evils I have escaped will be a healing balm to existence."

"Would I could tarry with you!" sighed Juliette.

"You!" demanded the novice; "alas! what sorrow would you fly? what danger would you shun?"

"I would fly a sacrifice my heart revolts at," replied Juliette; "I would shun a marriage which excites detestation and regret. The duke de Vermandois is not the being I would picture, is not the being I can love. He has rank, he has riches, but boasts not one charm beyond; besides," and her snow-white bosom heaved with a labouring sigh, "besides, he is as old as the marquis, my father."

"True," said the novice; "but your heart violates no compact, pants with no

hidden prepossession; as a wife, you will burst upon the world, and the tie of duty will restrain the wayward flights of fancy."

"And will the tie of duty make me happy?" artlessly questioned Juliette; "will it make me contented in my station? will it make me grateful for my lot?"

"It will make your lot to be endured," replied the novice; "nay——"

"Is that all?" interrupted Juliette; and her features betrayed the saddened expression of melancholy.

"Yes, more," resumed her friend; "it will arm you against the force of flattery, and the dangerous influence of delusion."

"Ah! but it will poison the spring of hope," murmured the desponding Juliette,

liette, "and leaden the galling fetters of bondage."

"Say, rather, that it will soften the fetters of bondage," observed Monique, "and reconcile the local ills of existence. You may be happy, for you may live for the bliss of others; exalted charity, uncurbed benevolence, is a rich store of peace, which individual evils can scarce destroy. Had such a field been mine, had such a claim withheld me, the world had not been renounced; society had not been deserted. I was left alone, unblest and unblesting; no tie claimed the office of endearment, or the conciliation of regard; my feelings were untaxed, for the grave had left no candidate for favour. My father fell in the field of honour; and my mother, writhing beneath the stroke, gave me an orphan to the

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world.

world. She had prayed for death, but the cry of helplessness awakened the dormant feelings of nature; she had prayed for death, but maternal solicitude combated the fell powers of calamity, and roused her thoughts e'en from the contemplation of a husband's tomb."

"Unhappy widow!" sighed Juliette, and a trickling tear indicated the force of sympathy.

"You judge rashly," mildly resumed the novice; "religion tempered her sorrows, nay, compressed them within the calm current of resignation. She was not unhappy, for every thought was innocent; her life passed in the unvarying exercise of duty, in the calm philanthropy of beneficence. 'Tis true, her features wore a pensive cast of care; but frequently would she relax them, for she
felt

felt that the repining murmur of discontent was a reproach to the ordinations of Providence."

"She must have been a saint," exclaimed Juliette.

"She *is* a saint," rejoined the novice, "for she is in heaven!" Her voice faltered; memory called forth a tear, which piety vainly essayed to repel. "She left me," struggling to regain composure, "without a guide; at an age, too, when danger threatens in a thousand shapes, and the heart boasts no security."

"And yet you triumphed," said Juliette.

"I triumphed," replied Monique, "because I fled. Under the guise of friendship, the temptations of love assailed me. I was scarce eighteen, unacquainted with the snares of the world,

and a stranger to the artifice of man. The voice of kindness revived my drooping spirits, and filled me with a hope that I was not altogether destitute. Gratitude aroused every faculty of my nature, and the assiduities of friendship kindled the energies of love. Mine were no common feelings; they were strong, they were decided; uninfluenced by worldly motives, unrestrained by cold reserve. I dreamt not deceit, for I felt incapable of treachery, and I weighed the heart of St. Aubin in the same scale. The poignancy of grief had subsided; my mother was remembered with tenderness, but not with that bitterness of regret which marked the first hours of her loss. Then the arguments of reason seemed an insult to my feelings, and the soothing remonstrances of attention a quickening spur

spur to sensibility. St. Aubin marked the change—marked the smile of new-awakened hope—marked the sigh of new-awakened affection—marked me for his victim,” shuddering; “but I escaped the snare.”

“His victim!” repeated the attentive Juliette; “ah, sister! does the world contain hearts so base, so relentless?”

“Alas! the world teems with beings of a similar stamp,” said the novice; “beings who, with oaths and pernicious counsels, violate the confidence of innocence, and prey on the peace of the unwary!”

“How are they to be discovered? how are they distinguished?” eagerly questioned Juliette.

“Deceit lies in the heart,” replied

Monique, "and often mocks discernment."

"And yet the mask will drop," said Juliette.

"The mask did drop," rejoined the novice, "and Heaven inspired me with fortitude — with resistance. St. Arbin knew me destitute; no friend to resist, no refuge to protect; he watched the growth of influence, he marked the force of love; he saw my young heart ensnared beyond the power of recall; he saw the delusions of sophistry had sank deep; and then he dared——he——" She hesitated; a quickening blush mantled her cheeks; and turning away her face——"he would have seduced me, but I fled, and these walls became my sanctuary."

"And you forgot him, you renounced him?" observed Juliette.

"Yes,

“Yes, for ever,” fervently exclaimed the novice; “forever I renounced him. But the strength of memory baffles the resolutions of the soul: the heart, once enslaved, is long ere it regains the exercise of its powers.”

“Does it ever regain them?” asked Juliette.

“Yes, where pride aids the effort,” answered Monique, “for then does reason, then does virtue contend for the mastery of passion. My retreat has been discovered, has been assailed; St. Aubin has been at the grate—has pleaded repentance and reparation; but, though sensibility yielded, resolution remained firm. From the mother superior I heard the tale of remorse; but not for one moment did I suffer my eyes to behold the being who had once so fatally deluded my senses. He wrote to me. His lan-

guage was pathetic, his colouring highly wrought ; he pleaded the force of education, and the prevalence of example. By blackening the world, he essayed to screen his own deformity ; but vain was the casuistry of deceit. Secure in the temple I had chosen, I transcribed the revolution in my ideas, and affirmed, that the world possessed not one charm which could cost a sigh in the renunciation. I tendered my forgiveness ; I poured forth prayers for his happiness ; and concluded with my unalterable resolution of seeking peace beneath the impenetrable veil of concealment."

" Did the resolution cost you no pain ?" questioned Juliette ; " did the sorrow, the remorse of St. Aubin awaken no lingering tenderness ?"

" No," replied the novice. " My resolution

solution was not the vagrant flight of anger, or the transient conclusion of revenge; it was formed on reflection, it was the decision of reason. Could I hope for happiness with the man who had forfeited my respect? Could I rely with security on the man who sought to degrade me? No: though superior in birth, though exalted in rank, I felt he was unworthy of me, and the struggles of compassion vanished at the denouncement of pride. I had loved him with an enthusiasm alone my own; with an ardour which mingled with my existence—which formed almost the principle of my nature—which would have defied the lapse of time, or the force of affliction. I would have watched him in the hour of calamity, I would have attended his wanderings, and shared his cares; but he

cast away the heart of a faithful friend, and sealed the fiat of separation."

"And no existing scruples, no lingering tenderness, pleads the cause of St. Aubin?" asked Juliette.

The novice breathed a half sigh; her averted cheek glowed a deeper tint, as softly she articulated—"The magic of prepossession often defies the arguments of reason, but the privilege of action yields to the controul of resolution. It may be long ere the name of St. Aubin can be heard with indifference; yet, could he penetrate this retreat, could he appear before me, could he, armed with the eloquence of love, essay the winning arts of entreaty, I would spurn them all. My tongue should breathe no reproach, neither should my manner betray indecision; I would tell him, Virtue, once frightened,

frightened, had sought a sanctuary, which artifice could not tempt her to forego."

"Heroic girl!" exclaimed Juliette.

"Ah, no, my friend," rejoined the novice, "short would be the reign of heroism; with the necessity for exertion would it fly, and tears perhaps might record the return of weakness—might ——"

"Tears, but not of regret," interrupted Juliette.

"Ah, no," resumed Monique, and the sparkling animation of her eyes betrayed the energy of her decision, "tears of outraged feeling. Tyrannic love may be dethroned, but thought will stray; thought will, with torturing minuteness, revive the painful past. Three years have fled since I became an inmate of Bena Copia; St. Aubin has ceased to per-
secute.

secute. With the lapse of time, my ideas and my hopes have undergone no change; established on the basis of devotion and faith, my heart feels grateful for its escape from worldly temptation, and calmly awaits the moment which shall install me a humble candidate in the sacred vocation of my calling."

"Would I, too, possessed the liberty of a free election!" sighed Juliette.

"Retract that wish, unthinking girl," replied the novice; "parents, kindred, situation, stamps that wish with irreligion and ingratitude. To me the world holds forth no lure to tempt me from my cloister; to you it teems with gay scenes of coming happiness. Thousands will court your favour, and hang upon your smiles; thousands will bless the hour which gave you to society, rich in a heart
heart

heart expanded by benevolence, superior to the contractions of prejudice and pride."

Sweet was the smile which lightened up the countenance of Juliette, as she listened to the praise of her friend—praise, not the unmeaning polish of flattery, but the genuine tribute of disinterested affection—praise, which sinks into the heart, which cherishes the noble perseverance of emulation and virtue. Such was the friend, whose gentle and improving converse lightened the monotony of time, and endeared the hours of seclusion. But as in society, so is the monastic life varied by a diversity of characters; the same passions harboured not in different breasts, neither does the pursuits and propensities of human nature, more than the human countenance, depend

pend on one regular standard. Alike necessary to the well-being of each other, the epitome of life may be traced in a contracted circle, where a contemplative mind may read the turbulence of passion, the never-dying energy of ambition, the thirst for glory, the persevering conquests of application, and the subordinate meekness of submission—

To clash, to rule, with opposition dire;

Some sway the heart, while others kindle fire.

To minute the inmates of the convent of Bena Copia is not my intention, neither to scan the motives of self-immolation. As in most religious societies, the effect, but not the causes, assimilated; and the timid virgin, the contrite sinner, the persecuted matron, and the heart-rivd widow, sought peace beneath the altar of the same habit.

One

One nun alone must infringe upon my system of procedure—a nun, whose actions, whose pursuits, whose habits, whose occasional disclosures, teemed ever with the thickening vapours of mystery. This nun was the sister Laurette, the repining inmate of a narrow cell, the condemned victim of power, the struggling prisoner of coercive authority. In the meridian of youth, when Nature's kindling hand had stamped in mortal mould the breathing semblance of immortal beauty, when every grace combined to deck the woman in the angel's form, she was severed from the world, severed from the homage of admiring man, and destined to the cold, the joyless apathy of prayer. It was night when the convent-gates closed upon her, when the convent-walls echoed the phrenzied shrieks of her despair ;

despair; but the mandate was despotic; the royal signet stamped the fiat which destined the prisoner to a living tomb. Her rank, her name, her crimes, her sorrows, all alike were hid, and no coming mercy dawned a respite to her fate. Racked with contending passions, her feelings uncontroled by piety or fortitude, violent were her efforts of resistance, prophane the exclamations of her wrath. She vilified Heaven, she vilified man, she cursed the callings of Christianity, and breathed the bitter execrations of a relentless spirit. Subdued nature yielded to the paroxysm of rage; but, even when her frame was exhausted, even when fever preyed upon her strength, imagination knew no cessation of quiet. Fearful were the flights of her delirium, and frenzied the shrieks of her despair.

despair. It was then she raved of blood!—it was then she whispered murder!—it was then the pious sisterhood, with looks of horror and dismay, blessed the calm of innocence, and prayed for future mercy. Charity harboured in the breast of the sister Lucille. 'Tis true, she was a fanatic; 'tis true, the pollution of sin, glowing on her faded cheek, sought in vain to check the reign of soft compassion; but Pity, like a lingering cherub, firmly kept the field, and wept the lapse which bigotry condemned. Never, for a moment, did she steal from the side of the forlorn one—never shrink from the task humanity imposed. She smoothed the thorny pillow of disease, and watched the electric flights of phrenzy; she treasured the wanderings of extraneous thought, and oft conjoined the unformed.

start

start of madness. The object of her care revived, but with strength returned the fire of unbending pride, the defiance of persevering obduracy. No smile of gratitude spoke the acknowledgment of favour; rather did her manner betray reproach, for having snatched her from the freedom of the grave. Tears marked not the hour of compulsory profession, nor did one sigh heave the white bosom of beauty. Cold was the glance she cast on heaven, doubtful the smile which hailed the psalmody of the sisters. With undaunted step, majesty on her brow, and grace in every movement, she proceeded through the choir. The solemnity of prayer relaxed not her features, neither did it soften the bent of her resolves. She heard the closing admonition; she felt the death-fraught veil enshroud her
brow,

brow, yet did no start betray her feelings. Firm, even to apathy, she returned to her cell, and there buried every intruding weakness from the eyes of the sisterhood. In vain was she dragged to the confessional—in vain were the pious exhortations of the lady abbess essayed; never would she breathe the tale of concealment—never disclose the secret of past enormities—" You have made me a nun," she would reply, to the threat of eternal denouncement, " but not the tortures of inventive tyranny can unseal my lips; you have buried me in this solitude, but the privilege of self-examination shall be my own."

Years wore away without producing change. The sister Laurette proudly defied the authority of the superior, and treasured the seeming mystery in her own breast;

breast; but the canker-worm preyed upon her peace, faded the roses on her cheeks, and dimmed the lustre of her eyes. Sometimes would she exclaim against the coercion of power, but oftener would she sit in moody abstraction. With repellent coldness ever would she meet the advances of tenderness; with impatience, but oftener with studied contempt, the arguments of piety. Wrapped within herself, she parried the prying questions of curiosity, and lived, as it were, estranged from the members of her own community. Strict was the watch upon her movements; never, for an instant, was she permitted to approach the grate; and at given festivals, and public inaugurations, she was banished the privilege of the chapel. No soul was to behold her charms; for the letter of her
commit-

commitment ran—"That the sister Laurette, condemned to a life of penance and self-mortification, was to be dead to every eye, save the inmates of the convent of Bena Copia."

CHAP. V.

All days—

Henceforth are equal;

To-morrow, and the next, and each that follows,

Will undistinguish'd roll, and but prolong one

Hated line of more extended woe. COLGRIEVE.

.....

Thou hast a grim appearance, and thy face

Bespeaks command in it. SHAKESPEARE.

CHANGED was every object within the dark walls of Valombre; gloomy melancholy seemed there to reign, and dissatisfaction and regret to colour the sigh of penitence

tence—at least, in the eyes, in the ears of Theodore. No longer was it the coveted haven of repose—no longer the desired barrier against sin and temptation; futurity was seen through the medium of love, and the world panted after as the Elysium of bliss. Every former pursuit gave place to the all-conquering impetuosity of passion; and the unconscious Juliette lived in the brain, rioted in the heart of the inexperienced missionary. What before had constituted pleasure, could no longer boast an attraction; books, horticulture, nay, the charms of nature, became tasteless and uninteresting. The pursuits of his former recreative hours were neglected, and every energy of his comprehensive mind sank into inactivity and despondence. The corroding worm of hopeless enthrallment

ment gnawed upon his peace, and the mysterious tenor of his own destiny yielded to the destiny of another. He could think, he could dream but of the affianced marriage of Juliette—but of the blank, the hopeless void which futurity opened to his perception.

“What new change do I behold?” inquired father Betsolin, starting at the anguished sigh which heaved the bosom of his pupil.

The youth started; the vivid glow upon his cheek heightened, and his dark eyes sank beneath the scrutiny of his friend's.

“Surely,” pursued the monk, “some influence, hostile to peace, colours your every action, and stagnates the once sanguine stream of existence.”

“Father——” faltered Theodore.

“You quitted our retirement dejected,” resumed father Betsolin, “your return to it dissatisfied: before your departure, the offices of friendship appeared painful, because they were felt as a reproach to reserve; now they are become irksome, for they violate the courted privilege of thought. ’Tis in vain you would assume a mask the ingenuous candour of your nature prohibits. Theodore, from the earliest dawn of infancy I have studied your heart, and marked its every movement; some local charm supersedes the influence of Valombre, and binds it in the ready chains of enthralment.”

Theodore sprung from his seat—“Father!” he exclaimed, in quick and agitated

tated accents, "by what charm—by what hidden spell do you dive into the secrets of the soul?"

"I boast no talismanic power," said the monk, forcing a languid smile; "mine is but the common foresight of experience. 'Tis an easy task to read a heart unshooked in the artifice of the world; yours, my young friend, requires no interpreter."

"And can you, indeed, trace the strength of its feelings?" demanded the energetic Theodore; "can you indeed peruse the colour of its future destiny?"

"It is not for man to pierce the veil of futurity," observed father Betsolin; "the womb of time, with wise and gradual protraction, unfolds each coming change."

“ True, father, but yet you decypher the hidden spring of action.”

“ I can decypher the rosy hopes of expectation,” rejoined the monk. “ Though cold, and dead to the world, I have not forgotten the energy of a first impression. Nature, unerring in her decisions, forbids youth the supine calm of indifference; some attractive form has lightened the gloomy path of your pilgrimage, and whispered that life holds forth no enjoyment in dull, unsocial solitude.”

“ Attractive,” repeated Theodore, yielding to the warm ardour of his feelings; “ oh, father, it was a vision, so bright, so heavenly !”

“ A vision !” exclaimed the credulous father Betsolin.

“ So young, so spotless, so angelic !”
continued

continued the enthusiastic Theodore.
 " Ah! what emotions, what sensations did she inspire! Till then, my happiest moments had been but a negative existence—a tasteless, vapid blank; till then, the powers of life had been suspended; till then, the faculty to breathe had alone been mine."

" And from then," exclaimed the monk; " say, boy, what from then?"

" From then, father," pursued the youth, " I may date a new being; a being full of transport—full of hope—full of bliss——"

" Full of anxiety—full of apprehension—full of sorrow," interrupted the monk.

Theodore turned hastily towards him. He spoke not, but his features indicated his belief in the conclusion.

“ Fatal consequence of confiding temerity !” mournfully pursued the monk; “ fatal exertion of influence ! fatal lapse of reason ! Alas ! in the glance of a moment, you have coloured the coming years of life ; through the o’erpowering indulgence of your senses, you have hoarded a store of misery and woe. Ill-fated object of my persevering solicitude ! difficulties and dangers crowd upon your path, and every object is decked in the sombre livery of sorrow.”

“ No, father !” eagerly exclaimed the youth, “ every aspect is decked in the glowing livery of delight ; a new soul swells in my bosom, expands my faculties, and actuates every impulse of my nature. I breathe, I exist, I inhale the magic thrill ; the past is a blank ; the future——”

“ Illusion !”

“ Illusion !” interrupted the monk.

“ Be it so,” rejoined the energetic Theodore ; “ it is an illusion which cannot pass away—an illusion which blackens the barren contrast of past apathy. Ah, father ! surely woman, the bright ectype of excelling perfection, the existing image of vestal purity, the sweet semblance of heaven’s angels ! surely——”

“ You are enthusiastic, boy,” said the monk.

Theodore paused ; his cheeks were flushed with crimson ; yet was it but the hesitation of a moment—“ Father,” he resumed, “ to have seen her once, is to behold her for ever ;” and then, with all the warm fervour of youthful passion, he recapitulated his first visit to the convent of Bena Copia, the inauguration of the

sister Monique, and the matchless graces of her young attendant.

Father Betsolin attentively listened ; every sentence sank deep in his heart ; he trembled for the peace of his pupil, yet he knew not how to arouse him from his trance. His were no common feelings ; neither did the casual start of infatuation give strength to his expressions ; his was the warm language of the soul, awakened by the impulsive powers of sensibility. A new, an arduous task called for the exertions of the monk—a task, from which the frigidity of the cowl shrunk in apprehension, but which dauntless, persevering friendship hesitated not to perform—a task, which by gentle, almost imperceptible degrees, was to extract the barbed arrow of festering passion, and

and revive the salutary dawn of long-banished cheerfulness. Every hour, snatched from devotion, at once became dedicated to social intercourse; and father Betsolin, banishing the austere gloom of abstraction, courted the insinuating smile of cheerfulness, to charm his beloved pupil into exertion.

Grateful for the effort, eager to express his lively sense of obligation, Theodore also became an actor in the same drama; but though he smothered the intruding sigh, and checked the melancholy indulgence of his feelings, yet his heart glowed with the same fervency; and memory, faithful to a first impression, tinged his sleeping hours with the delightful dreams of approaching bliss. Sometimes the delusive visions of slumber levelled every obstacle; sometimes

it snatched him from the gloomy walls of Valombre, and transported him into the Elysium of her society; then again the gathering clouds of calamity would intervene, and the fitting image of Juliette shrink from the extended reach of his embrace; sometimes, perturbed, restless, he would brood o'er the tale of fancied coercion, and weep the imagined stretch of parental authority; sometimes, in his "mind's eye," he would behold her dragged to the hymeneal altar, and fettered with compulsory chains. Days and weeks wore away in painful protraction, yet was he unable to snap the bonds of restraint—yet did the peerless image retain all its fascination.

The moon had twice, in full-attained splendour, mellowed the face of creation with its mild and heavenly radiance, dappling

pling the wood-crowned summits of the mountains with the light and shade of her reflections, yet Theodore visited not the ruined archway, nor in thought recalled the image of the mysterious stranger. It seemed as though every perception was absorbed in one; as though love, admitting no secondary thought, tyrannically swayed the sceptre of authority. His once eager search to elucidate the hidden secret of his birth appeared suspended, and the very name of parent had lost the magic spell of attraction. Such had become the shapeless tenor of existence, such the apathy of a mind once alive to energy and exertion; for

Love's subtle poison, midst the soul infus'd,
 Snatches from wisdom the rein of action,
 And spoofs at idle struggles. Love rules o'er
 Man omnipotent. To reason's cogent
 Powers—to arguments profound—to threats—

To promises—to angry words—to tears—
 To plaints—to woe—he yields no tittle of
 His high authority.

It was long past the hour of Nature's respite from labour, when each narrow dormitory contained the sleeping form of its inhabitant, and Death's drear sister, Silence, reigned within the walls of Valombre, that Theodore, stealing from the stained casement of his cell, from which he had long watched the dark volume of clouds rolling o'er the disk of the waning moon, stretched his wearied limbs on his hard and solitary couch. He had mused o'er the unvaried blank of his prospects; he had exhausted imagination in groundless hopes, in futile promises; he had journeyed o'er again his mission to Bena Copia, and lingered o'er the magic charm of first enthrallment,—when
 every

every blissful dream, nay, the fairy image of Juliette, was put to flight, by the opening of his cell-door. A cautious hand reclosed the latch, and the next moment, starting erect, he beheld the gigantic figure of the stranger, habited as before, in the borrowed garb of Valombre's order. Doubt, horror, apprehension, froze every impulse of speech, and chased the rosy bloom of health; his eyes were rivetted on the intruder, and his hand pressed upon his throbbing heart.

"Rise, Theodore," whispered the stranger, "and repair to the ruined archway: you have neglected the sacred tenor of your oath; but justice yields to mercy."

The youth shuddered.

"Theodore, arise, and fly to the ruined archway," authoritatively repeated the stranger.

stranger. "I will await you beneath its sheltering gloom. Remember, though slow to execute the threatened deed of wrath, resistance entails death."

The stranger fled from the cell; and Theodore, trembling at the heavy denunciation of vengeance, prepared to follow. With slow and measured footsteps he passed down the passage, fearful, by disturbing the deep repose of the brotherhood, of incurring questions he was unable to resolve, trembling at the slightest sound, and starting as the lengthened shadows of the cloisters chequered his path. The night air blew cold and cheerless, gathering amidst embowering shrubs, and dying in melancholy cadence. Theodore, impelled rather than willing, turned not one glance towards the monastery, but hurried to the appointed rendezvous.

rendezvous. The towering outline of the figure receded as he advanced; he saw it shrink within the shelter of the archway, and then heard his own name pronounced in a whisper—"Yes, it is I," replied the youth; "Valombre's brethren suspect not my uncourtly visitor."

"'Tis well," exclaimed the stranger, "Theodore, your own negligence has brought me hither. Think not to escape the o'erwhelming sway of my authority; the grave alone can loosen the fetters you have forged."

Theodore shuddered—"Ah, that its influence would indeed dissolve the thralldom!" he articulated, and then he breathed a long and labouring sigh.

"Foolish boy!" resumed the unknown. "In the flower of youth, in the dawning spring of bliss, when the world holds

holds forth the dazzling lure of pleasure, and fancy revels in the region of delight, would you blast the energy of action? would you turn untasted the intoxicating draught? would you——”

“No, no,” interrupted the ardent youth, every idea absorbed, devoted to Juliette and to love; “I would love to share the bliss of sympathy, to breathe the sigh of adoration.”

“You would visit the world?” said the wily tempter, eager to solve the clue of enthusiasm; “you would awaken from the lethargy of abstraction?”

Theodore hesitated.

“I will lead you forth,” continued the stranger; “I will be your guide to bliss,” smothering the smile of exultation, and rudely impelling forward.

But Theodore shrunk from the touch;

the

the deceptive charm vanished ; and, with a look of horror, he articulated—" Never !"

Anger marked the change in the features of the unknown—" I have reasoned, when force might have compelled," he exclaimed : " now, even now, can I drag you from this retreat, and boldly defy the vengeance of fanaticism ; nay, I can work in the gloom of concealment, and silence those who dare abjure my sway. Theodore," and he threw aside the dark folds of his habit, " behold this dagger ! remember the oath taken on the step of the altar—remember the threat the forfeiture of that oath ensures."

" Holy Mary !" he ejaculated, as the danger of his revered preceptor chased every lesser idea.

" The

“The monk lives,” resumed the stranger, “though in part the stipulated bond has been abused. Had I been the strict observer of that bond, murder had sprinkled the shrine of Valombre, and the monk’s spirit now beyond the reach of recall. I have been lenient; but mercy staggers: be wary, or it expires.”

“To fly!” faltered Theodore; “to brand my name with ingratitude—to stigmatize my actions with guilt and mystery—to be held up by the protectors of my infancy as a monster of deformity and vice——”

“Or to remain,” interrupted the unknown, “and verify man’s misjudging conclusions—to remain, and sign the death-warrant of confiding friendship.”

“Torturer!” burst from the lips of our hero.

“Can

“ Can prayer,” pursued the stranger, “ subvert the thrones of conscience? can it absolve the bitter pang of ingratitude? can it lighten the burdened soul of corroding thought?”

“ Is it *you* to ask me?” demanded Theodore, with an emphasis so striking that the stranger involuntarily started and shrunk, as though a blasting vision had froze the spring of action. Long was the pause which ensued. Theodore stood undaunted, and a proud superiority marked the expression of his features.

“ Boy,” at length said the stranger, and then he paused, and then banishing the dark cloud of o’erwhelming rage, and summoning a smile of deep-fraught meaning, continued—“ I would leave you to your fate, but pity at its gloomy tendency propels me—I would leave you

to

to breathe and die in obscurity, to linger out a life of deprivation and misery, did not more than common feelings urge the office of deliverance—I would leave you to the numbing influence of priestly interposition, but affection, o'er-ruling destiny, sways my actions. Has Nature indeed lost her impulsive controul? has she sacrificed all her energies to the blank of fanaticism? has she ceded every bright, every gay, every alluring expectation to monkish apathy? Mistaken boy! the world holds forth ties of resistless power—ties which, stealing on the heart, claims the soft fervour of instinctive homage—ties which the sacred bond of nature stamps indelible and holy. Once the name of parent——”

Theodore grasped his arm; the magic chord vibrated to the touch: quick was the
pulsation

pulsation of his heart, varied the expression of his features, as, with aching, gasping impatience he implored an explanation.

“ ’Tis I alone can solve the seeming mystery of your birth,” said the unknown; “ I, whom you reject, whom you despise; I——”

“ You! you!” exclaimed the panting Theodore; and wild was his action, for his arms grasped the cloak of the stranger, as he knelt imploringly at his feet.

Every threat was obliterated, every past apprehension lost, every dormant feeling awakened, every cherished hope revived—“ Arise,” said the unknown. “ Theodore, be submissive, and the veil shall be removed; fly from detention, and a father’s arms shall enfold you.”

“ Lead me forth,” exclaimed the youth.
 “ Lead me to my father. Amidst a host,
 instinctive

instinctive nature will point him out. My father! oh, righteous Heaven! 'tis duty urges to submission."

"Come on, then," said the stranger: but the quick eye of our hero, perusing the smile of triumph, rivetted him to the spot; a cold, a chilling pang darted through his heart, and dangers of unknown, of shapeless tenor, rose to his imagination—dangers so black, so threatening, that his scared soul shrunk shuddering from the brink. Expectation's flowery verdure vanished; the budding roses died; and from their withering leaves crept forth the serpent-sting of guilt. Life would he have relinquished, to have purchased the past calm of freedom—to have escaped the perils of the stranger's influence; but vain was the sigh of regret, vain the indignant start
of

of reluctance; wishes effaced not the record of the past, nor lightened the difficulties of the future—"Urge me no further," exclaimed Theodore; "here ever will I tarry. Guilt lures beyond this boundary, and gratitude urges me to pause. Go, fly, mysterious being! reason, honour, conscience, all bid me be wary."

"Then nature is neglected, and duty violated," said the disappointed Montauban; "the prying incentive of curiosity forsworn, and the offered blessing of a parent shunned, Theodore, reflect: the power to retract will soon be over, and regret, and unavailing repentance, will rack every hour of your coming life. Fate smiles but once, and obstinacy, or misplaced generosity, blackens all her prospects. The authority of a father
may . . .

may yet——” He paused—he started; he motioned Theodore to depart from the archway; for the shrill tinkling of the ma'in bell proclaimed the monks to have arisen——“Curse on the busy rites of faith!” he muttered; then quickly added——“To-morrow, seek beneath yon tablet the guide of action.”

Theodore fled, nor paused till he had regained his cell. His absence had been unnoticed, and he joined in the accustomed rites of devotion, without exciting the slightest shadow of curiosity. But though no external appearance marked the agitation of his mind, racked, tortured with irresolution and despondence were his internal feelings. Images of horror rose to his imagination, and despair cramped every energy of his soul. Alive to the inflictions of self-torture, he
shrank

creation, is the only being who adjudges the mercy of Omnipotence—who poisons every blessing with new and ceaseless desires—who complains, where he ought to be thankful—who weeps, where he ought to rejoice.* The picture of his own unknown birth, his own estranged destiny, arose to imagination, and a sensation like reproach closed with the neglected form of a parent, whom he had refused to seek; a parent, who perhaps laboured under affliction—perhaps from his hands could alone regain the calm of peace; what sacrifice could be too great in such a cause? what power sufficiently strong to withhold him?—“ Yes, I will go, I will fly ~~whether~~ duty urges me,” he exclaimed; “ every tie will I snap, every bond will I sever; in search of thee, my father, I will pierce the world’s extremity,

mity, nor repine at accumulating dangers; youth, strength, all in the pursuit shall be essayed; and when my courage falters, when my energy expires, fate will have exhausted the last lingering effort of existence, will have silenced the throbbing impulse of nature."

Anxiously he watched the revolving hours, anxiously he pined for the approaching day. He saw the sun sink beneath the horizon; he saw its bright reflection tinge the ethereal canopy of heaven; he saw it tremble on the stained panes of the monastery, and then shadow into grey. His mind caught the infection of sadness, and his heart drooped in the foreboding gloom of despondence; tears streamed from his eyes, as piety upraised them in supplication. He whispered a prayer for fortitude, and then,

wondering at his feelings, returned to the convent.

The monks had met in the refectory. He joined them, to silence suspicion; and having sparingly partaken of the evening's repast, eagerly resought the seclusion of his cell. The night was long and cheerless, for sleep but transiently bestowed her salutary powers; palsied starts broke his casual slumbers, and horrid dreams realized his waking anticipations. The stranger led him through difficulties of appalling horror, and bound him in the galling fetters of perpetual slavery. The morning arrived; the cheering sun enlivened the face of creation; it seemed to awaken joy, save in the breast of Theodore. He arose; he listened to the grateful chant of praise; he saw the feathered choristers towing in
"mid

“mid air,” and envied them the latitude of liberty. Alas! save in mind, he could boast no similarity; circumscribed had ever been his ways, and limited his sphere of action.

The day wore away, and Theodore, with restless impatience, awaited the moment for visiting the archway. It arrived. The vesper hymn was chanted, and the monks retired to their cells. He stole into the garden; no ray of light gleaming on his path, pierced the gloom of surrounding darkness. Groping his way with caution, he reached the ruined archway. Thrice he struck the tablet, but no sound was returned; he raised it, he thrust his hand into the aperture, and drew forth a folded paper. Panting with agitation and curiosity, he hurried to his cell, where, by the light of his

taper, he perused — “ No longer by threats will I intimidate ; 'tis to the heart the voice of Nature must appeal. Theodore, you are not an orphan. The brethren of Valombre have deceived you : they wish, under the plea of being friendless and destitute, to keep you to themselves. If you have courage to sever the bonds of thralldom—if you have art to elude the canting hypocrisy of spiritual advisers—if you have fortitude to search out the adventure, a father remains on earth to enfold you. At the hour of twelve, deposit beneath the tablet the determinations of reflection ; and at one, seek in the same spot its acquiescence or its refutation.”

Theodore snatched a leaf from his tablets ; his determination was made, ere reflection was courted.—“ I have courage,

rage, I have fortitude," he wrote, "but not art. Stranger, if hypocrisy must blind the eyes of assiduous affection, I own myself incapable of the undertaking. From earliest infancy I have been taught to shun the path of disguise, and my heart cherishes its lessons. If my father lives, let him claim me of the abbot, let him openly assert his prerogative, and the gates of Valombre will be unclosed. If my father lives, if he is such as my youthful fancy pictures, together shall we pour the grateful tribute of praise on those who have taught me to estimate his blessing. Stranger, I dare not quit Valombre under the ambiguous shadow of mystery."

At the hour of twelve this was deposited beneath the tablet; and at one, true to his appointment, he sought the

response—"The oath still exists—the secret still must be retained," wrote Montauban; "the slightest infringement calls forth the threatened vengeance, and insures destruction. Theodore, when the clock is on the stroke of three—when the moon shall have arisen, prepare to quit the monastery; meet me in the garden. Remember, I doff entreaty, and assume command. If you delay, if you hesitate, I'll pierce even into the heart of the sanctuary, and tear you from your fancied security; yes, in the face of the abbot, in the face of the monks, I'll stamp the preeminence of my power. Theodore, greet me as your friend, and let your heart cede to the yearnings of nature. If you are obedient, if you are grateful, mine promises never to abandon you. I will watch o'er your fortune, and
elevate

elevate you to a height far exceeding the most daring flights of your ambition. Theodore, you shall become as a rod of iron o'er the dastard soul of him who would destroy you. Court me as a friend; once an enemy, know me implacable. At the hour of three, remember, be punctual, be resolute; no start of indecision, no expression of reluctance, must mar the enterprise. The life of the monk Betsolin merits some sacrifice, the restoration of a father some exertion. Mark me, Theodore, this step rejected, this offering spurned, never more shall the eyes of the monk Betsolin behold the glory of the rising sun—never awaken to the coming day. His blood be on your head, a blasting monument of ingratitude; his pangs a damning prelude to perdition. And the fa-

ther who gave you being, Theódore, ó'er his head I wield the dagger of fate; break you the chains of his bondage, or become his curse—his bane—his murderer."

The paper dropped from the nerveless hand of the youth—"God of heaven!" he ejaculated. Every instinctive feeling, every genuine affection was awakened. "To fly!" and fearfully he paused, and despairingly he pressed his hand upon his forehead. "Under the shelter of night, when affection slumbers, to steal from the arms which fostered my years of helplessness—from the roof which sheltered me in the hour of desertion!" The doubts, the anxiety, the suspense of father Betsolin, rising to imagination, phrenzied his thoughts, and racked him with the gnawing tortures of regret—of
appealing

appealing tenderness. With hurried steps he paced his cell, his hand grasping the fatal paper, and his eyes swimming in tears. The clock tolled two—he started, as though an asp had crossed his path. In one short hour, Valombre would be forsaken, and himself under the guidance of a being, who ruled with the tyrannic sway of power; in one short hour, the possibility to retract would be passed. Alas! it was already passed; for the moment that enchains the mind deprives us of the privilege of action. Awed by threats, impelled by compassion, Theodore had long since yielded to the yoke of bondage, and felt too late the inefficacy of resistance. A tame submission, an unmurmuring acquiescence, was all that remained; no alternative offered itself, through which he could escape the

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threatened evil. Sorrow was a weak, a vain indulgence ; without lightening the heart, it expended moments, which exertion claimed for the last effort of affection. He could not explain the motives of his conduct ; he could not point out whither he was going, or whether he should again return ; but he could tell his friends that his heart was unchanged, that his gratitude was undiminished ; it would throw some light upon his disappearance ; it would relieve the anguish of incertitude. Chasing away the almost blinding tears of regret, he penned to his beloved preceptor, father Betsolin, this short transcript of his feelings.

“ A strange fatality pursues me !
I am impelled, without the power of resistance ;

ance ; I am hurried from Valombre, without the privilege of choice. While your senses are steeped in the calm, the balmy trance of forgetfulness, mine are racked with every pang, save guilt. Father, I dare not solve the seeming mystery—I dare not divulge the source of action : yet condemn not the mind you have moulded, the heart you have formed ; it may be crushed, but not subdued ; it may be destroyed, but not infected. Vice may allure, but rectitude cannot be shaken ; the soul may be assailed, but its principles of honour are immaculate. Father, my reliance is not upon myself, but upon the lessons you have taught me, but upon the Power you have led me to invoke. The privilege of prayer may be snatched midst the den of vice ; the fervent offerings of piety accepted, though

though outwardly deadened by the profane blasphemy of sceptics. Father, the beings—I dare not say more; I have sworn secrecy, and murder closes the crime of perjury. Think of me in the solitude of your heart's communion—pray for me in the holy sanctuary of your worship. Should time remove the veil, should Heaven will the chains of slavery to be severed, then, in the precious moment of liberty, will I fly to Valombre, will I revisit the haunts of my infancy, the friends of my youth. Should the ambiguous clouds of fate o'erwhelm me, should existence yield to persecution and calamity, father, I will die in the path of duty, with the precepts of immortal truth upon my lips."

Carefully

Carefully he placed this vague explanation of his conduct whither the eye of affection would penetrate; and then, with a pang almost mocking the dissolution of nature, descended from the dormitory, and hurried into the garden.

Montauban awaited him beneath the shadow of the archway—"Be resolute," he whispered: "one more exertion of courage, and our escape is insured." He extended his hand, but the youth shrunk from his touch. "What do you fear?" he demanded.

"Every thing," replied Theodore. "Beyond these walls no security can be found."

"Within these walls," ironically observed the bandit, "pleasure is unfelt, and freedom unacknowledged. The time will come, when example will thaw the
frigidity

frigidity of education, and restore to Nature her long-abused privilege of action ; the time will come, when the past years of infatuation will seem as a blank in existence, as a cheerless epoch, from which naught but misery and restriction can be dated."

" Alas !" articulated Theodore, with a sigh of desponding sadness, " the time, I fear, is fast approaching, when, from drear contrast, the past will hold forth the only hours of peace I am doomed to know."

" You are a fanatic," exclaimed Montauban, drawing a fillet from beneath his cloak.

Theodore started.

The bandit smiled—" It is but a temporary darkness," he observed, attempting to place it o'er the eyes of our hero ;

but -

but the youth struggled, and regained his freedom. "Theodore," said Montauban, in a voice which forbade objection, "the light of the moon must for a few moments be shut out; your eyes must not behold the path we traverse."

"The oath of secrecy shall extend even to my removal from Valombre," said the indignant Theodore; "surely then——"

"*It must be,*" interrupted Montauban. "My word I pledge for your safety."

"I fear not for my safety," exclaimed the youth.

"Then be submissive," rejoined the bandit. "Theodore, I command obedience. Remember my threat—remember my power."

The youth yielded a reluctant acquiescence. The fillet was placed before his eyes, and the vigorous arm of Montauban

ban

ban led him forward. Suddenly a sound, as if the falling back of a door, succeeded; and then, warned by the caution of his guide, he descended a steep flight of steps. The path was long, rocky, and uneven; but the arms of Theodore were fettered by the giant grasp of Montauban; and though he frequently tripped o'er loose and projecting stones, still, with unyielding perseverance, they continued to advance.

CHAP. VI.

Mercy—

—Is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show least
God's, when mercy seasons justice.

SHAKESPEARE.

“THERE is a strange mystery o'erclouding the actions of sister Laurette,” said the nun Lucille, seating herself by the side of Juliette, “an inconsistency of character, which baffles all our attempts at elucidation. Sometimes the tear of penitence hangs trembling in her eye; then the fiery gust of passion distorts her features, and betrays the undying influence of revenge: sometimes depressed, even to the sombre gloom of melancholy, she shrinks from the obtrusive kindness of compassion, and buries her sorrows
and

and her plaints in joyless solitude; then again she bursts forth in the language of reproach, accusing Heaven with injustice, and man with barbarity. Nay, often——”

“ Unhappy Laurette!” interrupted Juliette; “ is all her life thus spent in misery? does no intervening hour of content lighten the lingering horror of inaction?”

“ Oh no!” rejoined the sister: “ turbulent and ungovernable, she exists the slave of, passion, or the sport of woe. Religion softens not the bitterness of her complaints; for her soul scoffs at the pious exhortations of faith, and spurns ever the doctrine of true holiness.”

“ And yet she was professed,” said the astonished Juliette.

Sister Lucille crossed her bosom, then,

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in a low voice, continued—" True, she was professed, but——"

" But what ?" importuned Juliette.

" Alas ! my daughter, there are crimes —there are actions——"

" What crimes, what actions blacken the life of the sister Laurette ?" demanded Juliette, grasping the hand of the nun, and looking imploringly in her face.

" God reads the heart," ejaculated the devotee, raising her eyes in pious reverence. " Absolution lightens not the burden of sin ; for, with sacrilegious obstinacy, ever has she rejected the atoning offering of confession. She says——"

" Then are her tenets unfixed," again interrupted the horror-struck Juliette.

" 'Tis her mind which is unfixed," significantly whispered the nun.

" Surely

“ Surely the seeds of heresy have been engendered,” pursued Juliette, regardless of the remark, “ and her soul impiously breathes doubts of salvation. But what does she say ?”

“ She says,” rejoined sister Lucille, “ that God, not man, shall be the judge and the awarder. And when our holy mother argues with her feelings, and piously essays to stamp conviction, she sometimes weeps, sometimes sits in sullen silence, but oftener breaks forth in unbecoming violence, vowing, that though coercion binds her in unwilling slavery, its bitterest threat shall never extract the secret of her woes.”

“ Was it coercion which brought her hither ?” demanded Juliette.

“ The saints convert her! she calls it coercion,” replied the sister; “ but it was
mercy ;

mercy; she calls it the arbitrary stretch of unjust power, but rather ought she to hail it the blessed instrument of salvation. She was brought to Bena Copia to repent."

"If repentance comes not from the heart," observed Juliette, "'tis unavailing."

"True," rejoined the nun; "but to be snatched from the malign influence of sin, is surely a step to the soul's conversion; to be removed from the dire infection of guilt, is a quickening pass to mercy."

"We ought to think so," said Juliette.

"We *must* think so," pursued the sister; "for the corruption of the heart is too often owing to the prevalence of example. The world is a sad, sad theatre
for

for youth ; its temptations are so strong, and its sophistry so deluding : blessed are those who escape its snares ! Sin often borrows the garb of innocence ; and our own hearts, lured by its delusions, combat to undo us."

" Our own hearts !" repeated the astonished girl.

" Yes, lady, where sensibility takes the reins from reason ; for then are we hurried away by instinctive feeling, then are we guided by the wild energy of passion."

" Surely," exclaimed Juliette, with a heavy sigh, " against so many assailants, man can boast no safeguard."

" Alas ! my daughter," replied the nun, " there exists his chief danger : the presumptive boast of self-security leads him

him into the vortex of temptation, and hurries him into sin, when flight might have ensured safety."

"Yet how can we resist the impulse of nature?" asked Juliette; "when the heart pleads against us, how can we hope for conquest?"

"In evasion, not defiance," replied sister Lucille. "In a security like ours, the passions slumber, and virtue fears no lapse, because untried."

"Then can she claim no praise," eagerly observed Juliette; "for safety gleaned by inaction boasts not merit."

The nun was silent; she struggled to repress a frown, she pined to substantiate her own hypothesis, yet she felt the argument of her young opponent conclusive—"And you," at length she observed, forcing a smile of doubtful birth,

“you would fain brave the danger to obtain the praise; you would pass the fiery ordeal, and barter peace to martyr nature.”

“I would engage in the active duties of life,” mildly replied Juliette; “nor shrink with pusillanimous fear, because the task appears arduous.”

“You would expose your heart to the delusions of love,” mournfully sighed the sister. “Ah, unthinking girl! you would plunge it into a sea of woe, blasting all its hopes, stagnating all its energies.”

“How erroneously do you judge my meaning!” eagerly replied Juliette: “in truth, sister, I would but fulfil the mandate of my father.”

“Do you think the heart so passive?” asked sister Lucille. “Poor child! do you think its joys, its hopes, its anticipations,

pations, all under the guidance of authority? Do you think the effusions of sentiment, the sympathy of prepossession, smothered, or awakened, by the voice of duty?"

"Alas! I know not," artlessly replied Juliette.

"You will find *not*," resumed the nun. "Love scoffs at the chains of compulsion, and sways the soul, in defiance of reason."

"Ah! but not always," said Juliette; "love, sister, dies at the altar of profession."

"Love is *ahjured* at the altar of profession," rejoined the nun, and a passing blush dappled the pallid hue of her complexion.

"Then a vagrant thought will pierce even your barrier of sin," said Juliette,

pointing to the outer walls of the monastery.

“ Human nature is imperfect,” solemnly rejoined the devotee, “ fallen, debased ; save in the interposing mercy of Providence, it boasts no reliance.”

“ True,” said Juliette, “ and that mercy extends beyond the walls of Bena Copia.”

“ That mercy,” observed the nun, “ extends to the globe’s utmost limits ; nay, ’tis unbounded, ’tis omniscient !”

“ Then,” quickly rejoined Juliette, grasping the hand of the sister, “ why should the world be so fearfully shunned ? why are its busy scenes so full of peril ?”

“ Because,” replied the nun, “ its inhabitants are dissolute ; because, the slaves of passion, biassed by the laxity of opinion,

opinion, they sink under the seductions of sin and sensuality."

"Not all, sister," again observed Juliette. "Surely the world boasts some examples of moral rectitude."

"Many," rejoined the nun; "yet mark, and shudder at the perversion of its principles. The just, the conscientious, who bravely stem the mania of corrupt infection, are satirized, are ridiculed, nay, often shunned, as scarecrows to mirth, as antidotes to pleasure. In the world, the innocent too are assailed by the designing; and though virtue may not slumber, yet peace too often sinks the victim."

"Surely," questioned Juliette, "the innate consciousness of right, the early instilled principles of rectitude, must be

a safeguard, a shield against the random arrows of vice."

"Alas! too often does vice assume the similitude of virtue," replied sister Lucille; "too often does she deck herself in a fascination so wily, that the senses become entranced, and the powers of action dormant. Where then is the security for youth? where the safeguard for innocence? Juliette, too credulous girl! the heart, assailed by sentiment, softened by sensibility, knows no security in itself, for the very chains of its slavery are illusion. Propelled by a new, by an indescribable fascination, it hopes, it fears, it acts, it lives but under the instigation of its possessor; external objects become attainted, the magic charm breathes in every zephyr, fans the rosy
hopes

hopes of promise, nay, heightens the emerald garb of nature with the vivid colours of poetic fancy: 'tis then ——"

"Surely," interrupted Juliette, her cheeks glowing with the enthusiasm of her ideas; "surely, sister, your heart must have felt, ere it could thus delineate the force of passion."

"It has felt," mournfully replied the nun; "it has done more than felt, it has bled from it. Time blunts not the powers of memory, nor recalls the season of cheerfulness: the feelings of the heart once betrayed, the spirit once broken, where exists the balm which can soften the pang of retrospection, which can allay the anguish of corroding thought?"

"It exists in the offices of devotion," mildly observed Juliette, "in the never-dying mercy of atoning faith."

“ True,” rejoined the recluse, in token of conviction, “ religion is the sure antidote to woe ; ’tis the firm staff which upholds affliction, the best, the only reliance that the soul can hope !”

“ But it must be voluntarily grasped,” exclaimed sister Laurette, who unobserved had entered the cell ; “ it must be the soul’s free election, the heart’s unbiassed choice, else does hypocrisy stamp the colour of its fervour, and regret jaundice the sighs of imagined faith ; Heed not her pictures,” impulsively placing her hand on the shoulder of Juliette ; “ ’tis mistaken zeal, ’tis rash, ’tis deluded bigotry that decks this living sepulchre in the garb of content. She would catch you in the toil, she would condemn you to inaction and listless solitude ; she would remove you
from

from the world, and enrich this community with an unvitiated offering. Poor child! poor novice! she would fetter you with chains, so heavy, so corroding, that liberty, man's best bequest of Heaven, could be attained but in the grave."

"With what unhallowed latitude do you judge my motives!" said sister Lucille. "I would make converts, not enshrine victims; sister, I would lead a voluntary offering, not pollute our altar with a bleeding sacrifice."

The flush of passion momentarily tinged the faded features of Laurette, as, with a glance of ill-repressed anger, she replied—" 'Twould boast no novel charm: these hollow aisles, these cloisteral passages, could but reecho the plaints of dissatisfaction and despair; for I, alas!

exist a living monument of monastic clemency !”

“ You !” exclaimed Juliette, and the mysterious, the untold secret of sin was forgotten, or at least was effaced by the pleadings of compassion.

“ Beware, poor girl ! lest they should enshroud you,” resumed sister Laurette : “ they will name it piety, and then your shrieks will be unheeded ; they will say 'tis in the cause of religion ; they will say 'tis for the salvation of your soul, and the struggles of the flesh must yield. Oh ! 'tis a coercion the most oppressive, a power the most abused. They chained my body, but not my mind ; they dragged me to the confessional, but compulsion could not tear the secret from my lips.”

“ Say,

“ Say, rather,” observed sister Lucille, numbering the beads of her rosary, “ say that the yielding mercy of our most holy mother has kindly foregone the severity the relentless laws of justice would inflict.”

A mingled smile of contempt and defiance marked the features of Laurette— “ Self-interest is a never-slumbering plea,” she exclaimed; “ a plea which marks the actions of faith, which decks power in the garb of mercy. Ah! ’tis a sad world to live in; and this is but its epitome; all that are banished hence are its joys. Poor child! believe the exaggerated outline, invest yourself with the hideous garb; and when the delusion ceases, when the infatuation fades away, quick follows the rankling pang of regret. Oh! ’twill corrode, ’twill embitter,

ter, 'twill poison the sweet springs of life, and blast every cherished hope of enjoyment."

"Ah, sister!" emphatically observed Lucille, "to you it might open a field for hope, through the office of repentance."

"To me!" fiercely exclaimed the nun; then, with a vain struggle for composure, she continued—"hope expires in the moment of slavery: liberty is man's rightful privilege; he inhales it with the first breath he draws, and with his latest effort does it expire."

"Then should it be used as the bounteous bequest of Heaven," said sister Lucille, "not degenerated into the pander of lawless irregularity."

"It should be free from the coercion of self-arrogated authority, not subject

to

to the invasion of tyrannic will," rejoined Laurette. "Was it Virtue that dragged me to this living tomb? Was it Religion that chained me here in reluctant captivity? Say, was it Piety that barred the gate? was it Mercy that turned a deaf ear to my cries?"

"If the crime was heinous, mercy savours the award," answered Lucille.

"What crime?" sternly demanded the nun.

"Let Conscience answer," mildly responded the sister; "it is a power which owns no controul, which sways in spite of human effort, and speaks midst guilt's unhallowed clan. In vain the voluptuary, midst riot, seeks to drown her voice; in vain the casuist at substance scoffs, and to mere shadow clings; she will, she must be heard. Years are as yesterday;

yesterday ; she dives within the pale of man's remembrance, and stains anew the deed of blood."

Palsied was the start of sister Laurette ; thrice she essayed to raise her shrunken hand, and thrice the effort failed—"Blood ! blood !" she faltered ; "'tis false ! here is no stain !" then raised her sunken eyes, and snatched, with phrenzied grasp, the arm of her reprover,

"Not to the outward eye," resumed Lucille, "but in the heart, sister, the tax of guilt is *conscience*."

The nun retreated ; she drew her veil over her face, then paused in doubtful musing—"Can prayer atone ? Can man absolve ?" she whispered : "no, no, vain are the rites of superstition, vain the postulate strength of human power."

"No, not vain, sister, not vain," replied

plied Lucille; "Heaven hears, Heaven sanctions——" But the nun had fled, the cell was deserted. Sister Lucille dropped the beads of her rosary; she raised her hands in mild devotion—"Eternal Father!" she apostrophized, "'tis thou alone canst sooth the struggling spirit, 'tis thou alone canst ease the tortured soul!"

"Some fearful act preys on her mind," observed Juliette, "and poisons every hope of peace."

"Fearful," reiterated sister Lucille; "ah me! 'tis worse than fear, 'tis the corroding sting of guilt. Marked you the palsied start which followed at the sound of blood?"

"Yes, and the fading hue of her complexion," replied Juliette. "You touch-
ed

ed the string ; you held to view the mirror of her former deeds."

" Poor sinner ! " sighed the nun, " may Heaven change her heart, and give her to repentance ! Pain and woe have failed, and human aid and human counsels : the spirit of perverse, uncurbed will, has stemmed all efforts, and baffled all resolves. Omniscient power alone can bring a change, and speed the blessed hour of reparation."

" If murder marks the deed, that power, alas ! is passed," said Juliette. " Remorse cannot awaken the dead, neither can repentance blot the fatal record."

" That power is never passed," eagerly replied sister Lucille ; " that power is ever open to the penitent, is ever a healing antidote to guilt, is ever a sure award
of

of future mercy : but it must be sought, it must be solicited ; the bending knee, the broken spirit, the contrite soul, must mark the humbled crest of sin, and the firm hope of favour. Even on the grave's cold brink, salvation shrinks not from expiring nature, and man, though late, may yet repent and live—live for hereafter. Oh, would she but consider, would she but reflect upon the slight, the perishable tenor of mortal hold, conviction then would conquer, and pride, subdued, dethroned, would lead her to the pale of our confessional."

"Pride!" repeated Juliette; "alas! sister, can it be pride which marks her stubborn silence—which wars against her soul?"

"Too true; 'tis pride and shame," rejoined the nun, "false shame, which
braves

friends are your friends ; my home alike shared, no comfort shall you want, no indulgence shall you crave ; nor, till example has dissipated the contracted prejudice of education, shall the exertions of active service be required. Accustomed to the limitation of Valombre's cloister, the loss of liberty can be no deprivation ; and save 'liberty,' glancing around the cavern, " naught else can be sighed for."

" Yes, every thing else," unguardedly exclaimed Theodore ; " every thing that is dear, that is valuable in life, that makes the past pleasing, that decks the future in the garb of hope."

" Does the cloister's fanaticism, does the cowl's forbearance give birth to hope ?" demanded Montauban ; " does it suit the spring of youth ? does it coincide with the heart's wishes ?"

Juliette

Juliette arose to imagination, and the heightened flush in the cheek of the youth betrayed more than his lips uttered.

“Theodore,” resumed the bandit, softening his voice to a whisper, “the hearts of men are not impervious. I have seen the world in its busy maze, I have traced the spring of action; example may infect, but it cannot destroy the principles of nature.”

“True,” eagerly observed Theodore, reverting to the coercive restraint upon his actions; “neither can it destroy the principles of second nature—the force of education.”

Montauban smiled in derision—“It cannot destroy,” he repeated, “but, by contrast, it can make the past more dreary. Theodore, you are not the first
fanatic

fanatic who has forsworn his creed, and quaffed the intoxicating cup of pleasure. But no more; fatigue requires some cessation, and nature courts repose." He then led the youth into an apartment, separated from the outer cavern, and pointing to a couch, soft as the cygnet's down, "Sleep in quiet," he said; "let no intruding care steal on the rest of nature, for time will produce no change, save the increase of your authority."

"Authority!" repeated Theodore; "alas! what authority can I boast, when a watch is set upon my actions, and e'en my looks are constrained?"

"That watch shall be removed," replied the bandit, "when your actions speak concordance to my plans. Listen, misguided boy! our interest and our power shall be as one: in the field, we will

will admit of no division ; in the cavern, to our colleagues we will set the example of unanimity."

"What plans, what purpose am I destined to fulfil?" demanded our hero.

"Say, enigmatical controuler of my actions, for what hidden end was I so secretly conducted from Valombre?"

"The end is worthy of the mind which formed it," replied Montauban; "dive not into my motives. Be content to know, that, in infancy, I was the fate that checked the stroke of death, and gave you to the shelter of security."

Theodore's cheek turned pale, he staggered, he clung to the rocky side of the cavern; the murdered form of the abbot rose to imagination, and the hands of Montauban seemed as though dipped in blood.

"What

“What marks this change?” questioned the bandit; “what new impulse freezes the life’s stream of existence?”

“*The confessional of Valombre,*” murmured Theodore, burying his face in his hands.

Palsied was the start of Montauban; for a moment, conscience seemed to subdue the native ferocity of his disposition—seemed to bind him in the galling fetters of self-accusation; but struggling against her usurping power, he forced a fiend-like laugh, and demanded if his thoughts were ever to be blassed by the infection of overstrained piety?

“My thoughts are the never-slumbering effusions of a grateful heart,” said Theodore, “enshrined amid the cloisters of Valombre as within the citadel of benevolence. The powers of my mind,
the

the strength of my feelings, the rectitude of my intentions, all, all do I owe to the interposing mercy of charity—to the ceaseless lessons of example.”

“And nothing to Heaven?” sarcastically asked the bandit.

Theodore meekly crossed his hands upon his bosom, as piously he answered—
“Yes, all, every thing to Heaven; but next to Heaven, to Heaven’s servants.”

“And nothing to the author of your being? Ungrateful boy! nothing to the parent who gave you life?”

“Yes, honour, obedience, love,” eagerly replied the youth, whose pure mind ascribed to his ideal parent the rectitude, the virtues, so preeminent in his guide, father Betsolin; “I would let my actions speak the fervour of my feelings. Stranger, from the earliest dawn of re-
VOL. II. 1 remembrance,

membrance, it has been the cherished spur of anticipation; it has been the medium through which futurity has been viewed. You have said my father lives, that you alone can lift the veil of concealment, that you——”

“He lives,” interrupted Montauban, “but the hour for disclosure is not yet arrived. Mark me, Theodore, he must feel himself no secondary object; he will admit no superior sway; he must be the first to controul, the first to instigate; without appearing to rule, he must guide the reins of action; and then, and not till then, will the mask be removed.”

“He shall rule, he shall guide,” exclaimed the energetic Theodore, springing forward to stay his steps; “he shall find my heart tender, tractable, panting for the bliss of his affection. Tell him, stranger,

stranger, tell him the precepts of the monk Betsolin have fed the flame of filial affection—have ever honoured the principles of nature.”

“ Again the monk Betsolin,” muttered the bandit, pushing open the door of the chamber.

“ Oh yes, my father must, my father will bless him,” pursued the youth.

“ Stranger, stay and hear me. Tell him——”

But Montauban had fled, the door was reclosed, and he was left to the solitude of his own reflections. Long did he pace the cavern, long did he muse o'er the singularity of his situation, on the self-assumed authority of the bandit, and his own total inability of regaining freedom. Complicated and disturbed, imagination conjured a new form of torture, a form

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which

which leadened the dire chain of detention. It was gratitude — gratitude the most lively, the most predominant sentiment of his heart — gratitude, which picturing the grief, the dismay of father Betsolin at his supposed desertion, filled his eyes with tears, and his spirits with despondence. In vain he courted sleep, in vain he stretched his wearied limbs upon the downy couch of luxury; the fancied lamentations of the monk frightened the reign of slumber, and left him but the horror of corroding thought.

The dark, ambiguous hints of Montauban, his avowed knowledge of his fate, his promises of favour, his declaration of a parent's existence, again succeeded — again, with successive influence, fanned the light flame of hope, and swelled the sigh of blank despair. Never, for a moment,

ment, did he admit the possibility of dishonour, never pictured his birth derived from loose, unhallowed vice. His father was a prisoner, was afflicted, persecuted; but he was innocent, he was noble, he was reviled. Scenes crowding upon scenes, mocked almost the sway of rationality; the cavern was transformed into an ideal dungeon, and the image of his father stretched upon the straw; he heard the clank of his chains, he saw the iron corroding in his flesh. It was for him to sever those chains, it was for him to remove that oppression. Montauban was his guide, Montauban was the light which pointed out the dungeon.

“ Yes, Heaven is all-sufficient,” he articulated, in the wild energy of his feelings, “ and I shall live to bless the hour

of thy controul, Montauban, friend, conductor!"

He threw himself from the bed; he rushed to the door of the cavern, he pushed it open, he gazed around. Profound was the stillness; the torches still burned, but the outer chamber was deserted. The delusive visions of hope vanished; his spirits fell; his energy yielded to conviction; he reclosed the door; he returned to his couch. Heavy lingered the hours of repose and desertion. Theodore anxiously awaited the reappearance of the bandit— anxiously listened to each coming sound. The yellow radiance of the sun no longer spoke the return of day—no longer, as through the high casement of his cell, cheered, invigorated creation; the artificial

ficial glare of torches admitted no variation, and day, as night, wore a long unchequered blank. To minute the circumstances which progressively shocked the senses of our hero, to particularize the blasphemies of a lawless troop, or the arts with which Montauban sought to corrupt and gain ascendancy, would be trite and uninteresting in the detail of the history. Theodore shrunk from each species of dishonour, parried ever the allurements of sensuality; he combated without irritating, and maintained the firmness of decision, in spite of the shaft of ridicule, or the prevalence of example. His principles and his faith were erected on a foundation which vice could not circumvent, nor temptation destroy. He had seen the blessing of virtue in the pious uniformity of christian meekness;

he could maintain the track of rectitude, even midst a throng of impious profaners.

As yet, the moment of elucidating the seeming mysteries of his birth had been protracted; eager importunity, never-slumbering hope, had marked each interview with the bandit; but with a policy which baffled the ingenuous mind of Theodore, ever had he broke off in moments of interest, ever had he withheld the dear, the prized information.

It was on the seventh day of his detention in the cavern, when his thoughts, wandering, knew not where to rest, that Montauban joined him in his chamber—
“Theodore,” he exclaimed, “this life of inactivity suits not our calling; this torpor must be renounced, this lethargy broken. Interest summonses to Vermandois;

dois; our actions are quick, our movements scarce thought of. We fly in secret—in silence. Intruding eyes scan not our route. This night we quit the cavern, and to-morrow——”

“This night!” interrupted Theodore, starting in horror: “this night, Montauban? Alas! what hidden interest blends our fates, that I must still be dragged reluctant to your hated haunts?”

“Our fates are one,” replied the bandit. “Think you a common claim could sway my actions, or colour the hidden spring of my unwearied influence? No, Theodore, I boast a power which fortune cannot wrest, nor malice circumvent—a power, which on the pinnacle of high ambition can a favourite place, or blast his hopes, low as the slave of greatness.”

“ What act of sin must this high favour purchase ?” coldly demanded the youth.

“ ’Tis but submission I require,” resumed the bandit ; “ ’tis but a pliant acquiescence to my counsels. Theodore, I stole you from the slumber of inaction, to try the strength of my dependance ; to probe the soul my mercy snatched from death.”

“ Mercy !” repeated Theodore ; “ talk you of mercy ? The lion shows more mercy to the lamb, when, yielding to the instinct of ferocious nature, he immolates its being. You have spared life to martyr honour ; you would seduce my youth to acts of degradation, and colour the black deed with mercy ! You——”

“ Ungrateful boy !” interrupted Montauban.

“ Nay, hear me out,” pursued the undaunted

daunted Theodore ; “ hear the sandy tenure of your vile dependance. ’Tis no false start of courage, no painted shadow of imagined virtue. Heavy are the trammels of your boasted power ; for know, that pride, that feeling, honour, all despise the wily stealth of your authority. First, by a dastard threat you gained the oath of my obedience ; then, under the false knowledge of a father’s fate, wrought on my feelings, and lured me from the friends who would my cause have righted. Nay, further——”

“ Boy !” burst from the quivering lips of Montauban, and then he paused in deep abstraction, and struck his hand against his forehead. “ Theodore,” at length he exclaimed, “ no other being had lived so long to brave me. Forbear, for even you may overthrow the reign of

patience, and rue the deadly blast of fresh-awakened vengeance. 'Twas no vain threat which first your oath extorted; nay, even now, the passage lies as open, and no intruding obstacle bars me the entrance to Valombre's cloister. Neither did I a tale of fiction coin, to tempt you from your sanctuary; for now I could the truth disclose, and point you out the author of your being, such as your fancy decks him. I——"

"Ah! does he live? and is he indeed the being I have pictured?" eagerly interrupted our hero. "Say, torturer! does he brave persecution with a soul undaunted? does honour shine in all his actions, and valour in his deeds? does he soar above the common ills of fortune, and scorn the empty threatenings of your rage? does he——"

"He

"He lives to claim obedience," exclaimed the chief, in a voice of thunder.

"Lives!" echoed Theodore.

"Yes, within this cavern lives," rejoined Montauban.

Theodore glanced wildly around; he would have sprung to the door, had not the powerful arm of the bandit withheld him.

"Whither would you fly?" he demanded.

"To the dungeon of my father," convulsively sobbed the youth. "'Tis the same chains which bind us, the same fate which pursues us, the same soul which inspires us. Oh! do not hold me; 'tis duty, nature——"

"The same soul," interrupted Montauban, with a laugh of demoniac meaning.

Theodore started. He looked doubtfully

fully at him ; then, almost gasping for breath, with hands clasped in the attitude of supplication, " speak," he implored ; " speak, if you know ought of my father ; speak, as you value my senses."

" I said your father lived," replied the bandit ; " but I said not he languished in a dungeon."

" Then wherefore is he withheld from me ? wherefore is he so carefully hid from my sight ?"

" Hid !" repeated Montauban ; " who says he is hid ? 'Tis your own wild fancies, your own bewildered dreams. Boy, he breathes this air in freedom, he inhabits this cavern uncontrouled."

Theodore writhed in torture ; his limbs shook, as though blasted by a deadly palsy, and fixed and ghastly was his stare.

" Disgusted with the world, at enmity
with

with man, swearing vengeance, and strongly leagued with——”

Theodore darted forward: he placed his ice-cold hand upon the lips of the speaker, and, in accents almost stifled from the violence of his feelings, bid him desist.

Montauban essayed to support him; even his heart felt a sensation like pity for the misery he had caused: but Theodore shrinking from his proffered service, as though his touch conveyed pollution, clung to the flinty side of the cavern. He felt as one transfixed by lightning—as one blasted in the moment of anticipation—as one retaining the faculty of remembrance, and yet dead to the influence of hope. No sound broke from his lips, no tear escaped his eye, no sigh his bosom: his hands were wildly clasped,

elaped, and every power of action appeared suspended. Long was the conflict between wounded pride and nearly-subdued fortitude, agonizing the struggles of reason and feeling: every hope he had formed, every air-built fabric of ambition, every coming promise of greatness, every anticipation of honour, was destroyed — was annihilated. Ignoble, degraded, tainted with shame and guilt, to a ruffian, a midnight violator, a robber, an assassin, was he indebted for existence!

Montauban, who had long in silence traced the workings of his soul, who, in respect to Nature's outraged feelings, had forborne to interrupt his agonizing struggles, again essayed to offer consolation; but his efforts were as scorpion stings to peace; for when, with ill-re-

pressed

pressed anger, he exclaimed—" Armed with a father's power, I might enforce obedience ; but be affection, not severity, my rule ;" the youth, with phrenzied wildness, again sprung forward, again grasped his arm, and in quick despairing accents articulated—" Your son ! your son ! God ! God of mercy ! your son ! Oh ! give me air, or I shall die. My brain burns ! my heart is on fire ! Air ! air !" gasping, struggling. " Your son ! your son !" and pale, exhausted, he clung for support even to the shoulder of Montauban.

From the moment that resolution and reflection regained their empire o'er the mind of our hero, a new sentiment seemed to animate, seemed to inspire him ; it was the salvation of a father's soul ; it was to snatch from the trammels
of

of vice the author of his being, and dissipate the clouds of guilt with the awakening sunshine of repentance ; it was to pursue the track of duty, in spite of every danger, in defiance of every obstacle ; it was to attend the vile haunts, even of the chief of a lawless brigand, and watch each moment of dawning conscience to offer the truths of conviction.

Such was the new impulse which animated the energetic soul of Theodore, and such the enthusiasm of his nature, that it superseded every other consideration, and bound him in willing captivity. Had he been led to the gate of Valombre, he would have returned, he would have rejected every incitement of pleasure, to have performed the arduous task of self-imposed duty—"I am ready," he exclaimed, when the bandit again
joined

joined him in the cavern; "I will accompany you to Vermandois."

"And will you," eagerly questioned Montauban, "will you embrace our venturesome occupation, and share the glorious triumphs of our arms?"

"No, never," fervently replied Theodore.

The bandit frowned; but suddenly checking the impulse of displeasure—"Time and example," he observed, "will dissipate the mists of prejudice, and restore the free powers of action."

"Time too is my reliance," thought the youth, gazing with melancholy sadness on the fierce countenance of his father, "time, which changes the hearts of men, and Heaven, which spares them to the trial."

"The brave spirit of emulation will
awake

awake your dreaming soul," pursued the chief, "and kindle the flame of valour. Theodore, I prophesy the trance of inaction to be succeeded by the dazzling exploits of true courage."

Pride flushed the cheek of Theodore, as with shuddering horror he exclaimed, "Alas! what dazzling exploits can the life of a robber pourtray?"

"You are a novice," rejoined Montauban, with a smile of irony. "Boy, in the world men pray upon each other; 'tis the practice, 'tis the pursuit of existence: we but change the colour of design, and openly take what others extort by artifice."

"Thank Heaven," ardently repeated Theodore, "I have been shut out from the world! I have ever mingled with the benevolent and the virtuous, with souls grateful

grateful for existing blessings, at peace with themselves, and zealous but for the benefit of their fellow-creatures."

"And in that retirement you was happy," said Montauban; "in that retirement, you felt no inquietude, no desire of change."

Theodore's eyes sought the ground; his breast heaved with a labouring sigh, for his mission to Bena Copia recurred to memory—"I was ungrateful," he replied, "and forgot the real value of happiness, because it was in possession."

"Then murmuring discontent finds entrance even within a cloister's hallowed walls?" said the bandit.

"Nature is imperfect," observed Theodore, "and tranquillity unalloyed exists not upon earth."

"And must Nature bear the brunt of
your

your presumptuous wishes?" questioned Montauban.

Theodore started. Juliette filled his mind, and explained the ambiguous meaning of the chief; yet how he should possess the knowledge of his enthrallment was a cause of new wonder; how he should dive within the heart's sanctuary, and rifle its treasured secret, was a mystery not to be resolved. Yielding to the unguarded energy of his feelings, the name of Juliette arose to his lips, and with it the confession of his passion had been revealed, but for the timely entrance of part of the troop. Theodore, with recovered thought, felt grateful for the interruption, and watched their departure, to prepare for their removal, with a feeling like pleasure.

Alone, and unchecked in the flights of
Fancy,

Fancy, reason yielded to her fairy reign, and glowing were the dangerous pictures of delight; it was friendship, it was love, which, giving colour to his feelings, expanded every sensation of his heart. The parent he had found, the conduct he had prescribed, for a moment was obliterated, and Hope admitted no darkening cloud to scare her brightness. How delightful are the allotments of time, portioned by the sanguine anticipations of youth! how vivid, how unalloyed the budding promises of existence! Alas! wrapped in the intoxicating trance, Theodore had forgotten life is at best but illusion, and happiness a phantom, beckoning as it flies, evading as it is pursued.

Towards evening the troop departed from the cavern. An oath of inviolable secrecy substituted the fillet which had before

before blinded the eyes of our hero; and with a burst of thankfulness, which awakened but the smile of derision, he inhaled the freshness of unclouded space. Brilliant was the light of heaven, grateful the sight of vegetation; the rising slope, the wood-crowned valley, mellowed by the sun's dying rays, seemed decked in more than their wonted beauties, as he gazed on their variegated contrasts. He heard the cataract's loud roar, as quick rebounding from its rocky base, it threw its feathery surf; then turned to scan, with eager haste, the loved direction of Valombre's turrets. Alas! fancy alone could pierce the barrier, fancy alone could raise those walls which nature and which gratitude endeared: an envious forest rose, and intercepted e'en the view of his once-peaceful home. Sharp
was

was the pang of disappointment, bitter the tear which trembled in his eye. He was going far from the being whom his heart valued, far from the alleviating balm which friendship's power supplies, without one spur to deck his prospects with the zest of hope, without one anticipation of coming recompence. His eyes rested on his father, and a sensation of horror iced his blood. Condemned to such a society, chained to such a fate, to owe the duty of a son, yet to struggle with contempt and abhorrence, his features betrayed the colour of his thoughts; for Montauban sternly bid him substitute exertion, nor to the troop betray dissatisfaction and regret. Theodore bowed submission; but Theodore's heart refused the mask of cheerfulness—Theodore's spirit spurned at the policy of restraint;

he shuddered at the boasted triumphs of courage, at the anecdotes of rapacious plunder; he heard the yielding softness of mercy stamped with the degrading die of cowardice, and forbearance and moderation laughed to scorn; he heard the plaints of the bereaved traveller repeated, mocked, and the maddened shrieks of terror drowned by the loud bursts of unfeeling laughter.

“Can these be men?” thought our hero. “Saints of mercy! can these have been born with the same reason, with the same intellect, with the same feelings as the brethren of Valombre? Can the evil propensities of the world have marred the intentions of nature, and changed to a barren waste the once social properties of the heart?”

CHAP. VIII.

What means all this? Why all this stir to plague a single wretch?

OTWAY.

THE saffron hue of day shone faintly from the east, as the troop, emerging from a narrow defile, pierced the darkened boundary of a forest. Theodore spoke not; with spirits broken, with heart depressed, he moved by the side of his father, insensible to his observations, and lost to the coarse jests of Leonard. He was musing o'er a visionary plan of reform; o'er the possibility of arousing the slumbering conscience of the bandit, of establishing the dawn of repentance; he perceived not their approach to Vermandois, nor till the shrill blast of the horn severed the thread of reflection, did

he awaken to external objects; then he recognised the heavy walls of the castle from which he had before departed, and the thick entwining pine forest, obstructing the glance of observation. Echo's distant reverberations of the well-known signal had scarce died away, had scarce restored the native reign of silence, when the drawbridge was lowered, and the same uncourtly object who had promised shelter to the exhausted missionary, threw wide the castle gate. A smile relaxed the ferocity of his countenance, as he extended his hand to welcome his companions. Loud was the shout which marked the thrill of pleasure, as the troop halted in the court-yard.

“How fare ye, Randolphe?” asked Montauban, taking the arm of Theodore, and leading into an extensive chamber,
warmed

warmed and lighted by the cheerful blaze of a wood fire.

“ In troth, my noble chief, well,” replied Randolphe. “ But a curse upon the old walls, say I, for strange doings have marked your absence.”

“ As how ?” demanded Montauban.

“ Why,” replied the robber, “ the devil has taken possession of Vermandois, and so obstinately retains his hold, that Pierre and myself have threatened to fly the field, and join our forces at the cavern.”

Theodore’s eyes were rivetted on the features of the bandit ; he traced the deep cast of care lowering on his brow ; he remembered the words of his guide through the forest—“ *In the dark he is little better than a coward ;*” and believing conscience the only power which could

daunt a spirit so daring, hailed the information with delight.

Montauban guessed not the feelings of his son, guessed not the virtuous hope of reformation which flamed his nightly and his daily dreams. For a moment he was abstracted; for a moment he was lost in the labyrinth of his own iniquities, when suddenly starting, with a forced laugh he exclaimed.—“ You a hero, Randolphe, and own yourself subdued ?”

“ Let me face my enemy,” resumed the robber, “ then name a stouter heart: but in the dark, why, man, what sword can pierce a spirit, or combat the devil’s pranks ?”

“ A spirit !” echoed Theodore.

“ ’Twas but the eoinage of a heated brain,” observed the bandit, directing at the speaker a look importing silence.

“ Wine

“Wine possesseth incredible qualities; possibly the potent powers of the grape transformed your own shadow into an ideal phantom. Say,” with forced jocularity, “did it fly as you pursued? or did it tread upon your heel when you heroically retreated?”

“Shadows cannot speak,” replied the half-angry Randolphe; “besides——”.

“Speak,” interrupted Theodore, grasping his arm, and looking steadfastly in his face, “say, did it speak? did it warn you of murder?”

The bandit started; he half unsheathed his sword, then, checking his own impetuosity, breathed a smothered curse, and relinquished his hold.

But Theodore, lost even to the varying countenance of Randolphe, alone remembered the voice he had himself heard

in the passage ; and, with increasing agitation, again repeated—" Did it warn you of murder ?"

" I never peach," at length answered the robber, catching the eye of Montauban, which again imported silence.

Theodore shrunk dismayed.

The loud clang of the newly-assembled troop checked all further inquiry, and with restless impatience he awaited the privilege to retire. The chamber in which our hero reposed was at the further extremity of the same gallery which opened from Montauban's ; its ebon wainscot, sombre midst the golden radiance of a meridian sun, wore, through the lamp's partial blaze, a lowering shade, which scarce its furthest ray could penetrate. O'er the couch, black as a funereal bier, waved, in the time-worn canopy,
the

the raven plumes of former state; whilst, thinly scattered, might be seen the worm-eaten fragments of high-backed chairs and mouldering furniture. Theodore, exhausted, fatigued, more in a mood for rest than contemplation, cast but a cursory glance around, then strove to lure the slumber of forgetfulness, and blot the present from the page of thought. Buried in the trance of repose, he noted not the fleeting hours; and when he awakened to recollection, with grateful heart he blest the sight which broke upon his view—a sight long, long shut out—a sight which heedless man neglects to rate, because the lot of all; prized midst a dungeon's gloom, and doubly valued in the pang of deprivation. Long in the earth's cold bosom had he slept, and waked to artificial radiance, long cut off

from the bright glare of day had he pursued to hail the invigorating sunbeams ; now these sunbeams pierced into his chamber, now they burst upon his gaze, in all the splendour of unclouded majesty. Theodore bent his knee in humble prayer ; and then rising, rich in the blessed calm which true piety ever inspires, approached the window. He beheld the deep moat beneath, and beyond the dark verge of the forest. Scarce a breeze was stirring ; the dew glittered on the high grass, and the wild flowers hung pendent from its moisture.

To the call of Montauban he quitted his chamber, and joined the assembled troop in the hall below.

Day succeeded day, unmarked by any change of occurrence, save the exploring rambles of Theodore, who wandered
 midst

midst the pine forest, unwatched and unattended. No limits were prescribed, for no flight was suspected; his word was the pledge of submission, and his word the bandit knew to be a strong, an invincible barrier. He had accurately examined the interior of the castle, he had sighed over the wreck of past splendour, he had inspected the lonely chambers, and climbed each separate turret; but to the questions of curiosity, to the eager solicitations of awakened interest, he could obtain no solution. Montauban knew not, or would not own, the tale of its desertion; it was chance which had invested him in a possession, which neither opposition or inquiry had sought to subvert.

“ ’Tis strange that the present owner should suffer a domain so princely to fall to decay,” said Theodore.

“The minds of men are hard to resolve,” replied the bandit. “Possibly the duke de Vermandois prefers a social to a hermit’s life. ’Tis for the jaundiced gloom of disappointment to sink within a solitude so obscure, not for a promised bridegroom, rich in the glowing prize of youth and beauty.”

“Alas! how opposite his lot to mine!” sighed the youth, his thoughts wandering to the lady Juliette; “the one cut off from every joy, the other blessed with the matchless charm of reciprocal affection.”

“Learn better to estimate your own fortune,” replied Montauban. “Tell me, foolish boy, can youth and age assimilate? can *reciprocal affection* subsist between the timid disciple of religious enthusiasm and the aged cotemporary.

of

of a father's ambitious election? can
 ——”

But Theodore heard him not—he started; he grasped his arm; he almost gasped for breath: it could be none other than the officiating attendant on the nun of Bena Copia—Juliette, whom memory had faithfully cherished, whom memory had eternally recalled. His heart throbbed, his eyes were suffused in tears: it was the same mournful tale Javotte had revealed, in the glowing moments of first impression; the same assurance which had nipped the dawn of hope, and rified the spring of expectation.

“Theodore, what means this burst of mental passion?” demanded Montauban, scarce daring to credit the whispers of suspicion, “Tell me, enigmatical boy, what am I to conclude from this emotion?”

“Say,

“ Say, must she yield submission to a tyrant’s will ?” asked Theodore, unmindful of the question of the bandit ; “ must she ratify a compact nature and conviction shrinks from ?”

“ Unless,” artfully hinted Montauban, “ a lover should the fetters break of her obedience.”

“ A lover !” echoed Theodore.

“ Yes, a lover,” resumed the bandit. “ Where is the barrier which obstructs a lover’s passage ? blest with the smile of beauty, where lies the obstacle which daunts a lover’s hopes ? You have seen the lady Juliette ?”

Again Theodore started, and the crimson tide of rapture rushed to his cheeks.

“ Is it not into your confidence,” resumed the wily bandit : “ as a parent I might command, what, as a friend, I will fore-

go.

go. Theodore, follow my counsels; be guided by my experience, and *you shall win—you shall possess the prize..*"

"I—I," faltered the youth: "Father of Heaven! I become the husband of the lady Juliette!"

"You have seen her then?" said Montauban.

"Yes," replied the energetic Theodore, "and wear her eternally in my heart. It was her image which put to flight the frigid stoicism of education; it was her image which, changing every impulse of my nature, obliterated the once-cherished wish of the cowl's investment, and aroused all the genuine warmth of sociability. I saw her as an angel of peace, kneeling on the step of the altar, at the mournful inauguration of a sister of *Bona Copia.*"

"You

“ You are a lover,” observed the chief, smiling at the ardour of his expression, “ and the misty vapour of passion is as a film before the eyes. Cradled in the school of romance, successive infatuations charmed, and each alternately swayed the mind of indecision. You would have become a monk, because inexperience nominated friendship a sufficient security for happiness; you would have martyred the feelings of the heart, because the dreary walls of Valombre enshrined but the pious instigators of your faith. Theodore, the kindling ray of beauty was but wanting to arouse the never-dying flame of prepossession, to stamp you a slave and an idolator.”

“ You then have loved,” exclaimed the youth, grasping the arm of
Montauban,

Montauban, and gazing in his face with an expression of tender interest.

“ I am your father,” rejoined the bandit.

Theodore shrunk in despondence—shrunk in dismay ; his head drooped upon his bosom, and the varying change in his features indicated the struggles of duty and pride.

“ Boy,” pursued Montauban, his brow contracted by the lowering frown of disapprobation, “ the lineage is no degradation ; what I have been——”

“ No, no, not what you have been,” interrupted Theodore ; “ ’tis what you are which stamps the blackening die of misery on all my prospects—on all my hopes ; heading a clan of lawless brigands, existing on depredation, closing oft the rage of pillage with the blood of
the

Montauban smiled in derision.

"I would lighten the pang of vice; and hasten the hour of repentance."

"Go on," said the bandit, ironically.

"I would teach you to seek the promised hope of mercy; I would place you beyond the infectious reach of your colleagues."

"What! in the monastery of Valombre?" questioned Montauban, in the assumed seriousness of attention.

"There, or wherever inclination points," rejoined Theodore; "I will your footsteps tend, will share your wanderings, lighten all your cares; yes," yielding to the energy of his feelings, and picturing naught but the desired victory of religion and honour, "this realm, this country, all, all will I forego."

"And

“ And Juliette ? ” asked the bandit, willing to probe the strength of enthusiasm.

Theodore started ; for a moment he hesitated ; then, with burning cheeks, and averted eyes, continued—“ Yes, Juliette, the peerless Juliette ! to save your soul, my father, to snatch it from perdition, to give it back to God, I will forego—my life, my being ; renounce each darling hope, and perish in the exercise of duty.”

“ Strange boy ! ” articulated the bandit, moved, in spite of the force of custom, and the ferocity of nature ; “ not for the ransom of a thousand souls would I one passion—one pursuit have marred.” He paused ; he mused ; then suddenly added—“ Your recompence be my award.”

No

No change marked the actions of the banditti; no yielding indication of mercy in their chief, augured the awakening dawn of repentance. The days passed in rapine, the nights closed in intemperance. In scattered parties, each alike spreading consternation, the troop infested the country, sometimes plundering with wily caution, sometimes overpowering with bold and undaunted freedom, sometimes rifling the rich and prosperous, sometimes snatching even from industry the scanty pittance.

Theodore shuddered at the boasted triumphs of courage, and saw with horror the glittering spoils which usually crowned their incursions. Often he spoke of mercy, in spite of the laugh of rude derision; often pleaded for the unwary traveller,

traveller, and dared the brunt of jests and inuendoes.

“Join you our party,” muttered the surly Leonard, “and see whether opposition will not freeze the stream of your compassion.”

CHAP. IX.

“Sleep, tranquil, eases the lone couch of guilt,
 Nor stills the heart where rankles scorpion sin.
 Should vice oblivion woo, she only grasps
 The tell-tale mirror, which, reflecting back
 The past, colours the future in the guise
 Of madness!”

MIDNIGHT advanced; the last quarter had chimed, and Juliette, lingering o'er the supposed crimes of the sister Laurette, was unable to compose herself to sleep: 'Twas true, all she had gleaned was but
 from

from the suspicious whispers of the sisterhood—all she had imagined, founded but on the casual starts of a brain, if not dethroned, at best jaundiced by the heavy load of consuming care. Was it charity to denounce, was it justice to condemn on grounds so shallow? Her heart reproached her—her heart whispered she had oppressed one whom oppression had already humbled, one whom sorrow had levelled even to the earth. Tears streamed at the conviction, and regret pictured a thousand conciliating modes of reparation.

“Unhappy being!” she articulated, “whether the bleeding victim of sin, or whether laden with the false accusation of another’s transgression; but Heaven, who sees, who weighs, that Heaven——” She paused, for she heard a light foot-
step

step in the gallery. Alarmed at a sound so unusual, for silence had long-reigned within the narrow dormitories of the sisters, she listened, and the next instant beheld the latch raised, and the door of her own little cell pushed softly open. Curiosity and fear, alike commingled, rivetted her glance; scarce did she dare to breathe, and yet she watched for the intruder.

“Montauban! Montauban!” whispered a voice: “hist! hist! tread softly. Who can say you did it? Water will cleanse the stain, and all will be well!”

Juliette sprung from her pallet; she heard a retreating step, and followed into the passage.

“Why so tardy?” pursued the well-known accents of the sister Laurette; “fly, and I will await you—love never tires.

tires. Fly, Montauban! and when the deed is done, when all is over, I will ealm, I will——”

A shuddering sigh closed the sentence, and turning, she unconsciously approached Juliette. Her veil was thrown back; her dark habit folded around her; her features appeared stiffened, as though in death; no change marked their expression, or gave to her fixed, unmeaning stare one ray of animation. She was asleep, she was under the dominion of fancy; yet that fancy did but recall the past, that fancy did but act o'er again “the deeds of other years.”

“Blood! are you afraid of blood?” and then again her voice fell to a whisper, as softly she articulated—“Poison is as certain.”

Juliette started; horror faded her cheek

- to the pallid hue of the spectre-form upon whom her eyes so steadfastly rested: trembling she clung to the side of the gallery, for the nun again advanced.

“ Ah, Montauban ! what, still doubtful ? You know the signal ; be determined, be resolute, and the prize is all your own.” She paused ; she raised her hand to her forehead, in musing attention ; then, with a smothered laugh, rejoined—“ What do you fear ? have I not sworn to love you ? did I not fly when our secret was discovered ? Ungrateful ! take this ring——” But in the effort to draw the imagined offering from her finger, the taper dropped upon the floor. Instantly the sound dissipated the visions of sleep ; instantly the spell was broken, the delusion vanished. She started in wild horror—she would have fled ; but
Juliette,

Juliette, snatching her veil, restrained her—"Sister, fear not," implored the trembling girl; "'tis I—'tis Juliette."

The nun clung to her shoulder; she gasped for breath; she closed her eyes in horror—" 'Tis all imagination," soothingly whispered Juliette. "Sister, suffer me to lead you to your cell." But the nun moved not; nay, she clung tighter to the arm of her supporter, as though to stay her steps—"Holy Mary!" aspirated the shuddering girl, and then again she essayed consolation and entreaty.

Sister Laurette raised her head from the supporting shoulder of Juliette; instantly she seemed to awaken to all that had passed, and steadfastly fixing her eyes on the pallid features of her young companion—"Do not betray me," she exclaimed. "Swear, promise never

to divulge the secrets sleep has laid open."

"Fear not, sister," replied Juliette; "your wanderings were wild and shapeless."

"Could fancy form no combination?" eagerly questioned the nun. "Say, was there no link, no coincidence of matter?"

Juliette shuddered—"Ah, sister! misguided sister," she said, gently leading to her cell, "that link, that coincidence once confided to the ear of a confessor—once——" She paused; for the stern glance of the nun awed her.

"Proceed," said Laurette. "Yet stay; first tell me, how can a sinner's prayers give peace to a sinner's soul?"

"Though all are prone to error," mildly observed Juliette, "yet our sins,
sister,

sister, are not of the same die: some yield to the venal trespasses of humanity, while others—Ah! surely the tempted and the tempter come not within the same class.”

“ You are a nice casuist, though but a young convert,” said the nun, with a smile of mingled satire and derision.

“ Sister, you mistake me,” warmly rejoined Juliette: “ Heaven can witness I am no convert, for my ideas never wavered.”

“ Then, daughter, you are an enthusiast,” resumed Laurette; “ and, like sister Lucille, will die a martyr to the faith.”

Juliette raised her clasped hands to heaven, as softly she answered—“ Ah! would that the same enthusiasm—would that the same conviction could be in-

fused! Sister, reflect, what but the salvation of your soul——”

“Peace!” interrupted the nun, pointing to the door of the cell. “Leave me, child; my secret woe admits of no alleviation.”

“There are antidotes to poisons the most deadly,” remarked Juliette, lingering, as though unwilling to depart.

The nun started. Shuddering she buried her face in her hands; then hastily rejoined——“Leave me; my heart is already probed.”

Juliette took her taper, and quitted the cell. How could she offer consolation, how could she breathe the hopes of peace to a mind so desolated—a mind racked by the keen tortures of reproving memory—a mind beset by the scorpion stings of past enormities! Her prayers
 . were

were all she had to offer, and her prayers were despised ; but, in the lonely hour of meditation, she could remember the sinner, she could breathe the pious petition for coming grace.

The remaining hours of night were undisturbed ; yet though no intruder, breaking upon her solitude, dissipated the repose of nature—though she closed her eyes upon the cares of the world, and, rich in the undying calm of innocence, felt neither the pang of disapprobation or regret, still she lost not the spectre-image of the sister Laurette, but acted o'er again the horrors of the past hour. Another's woes called forth the sigh of commiseration ; another's crimes coloured the visionary flights of fancy.

In the morning, wrapt in sullen ab-

straction, Laurette fled at the close of devotion, nor e'en in the refectory joined the assembled sisterhood; nay, the pitying solicitude of Juliette seemed wormwood to her feelings, nor relaxed her stern brow with one approving smile.

"Heed her not," said sister Lucille, perusing in the features of Juliette the expression of sadness; "she is ungrateful for kindness, and dead to the soft alleviations of friendship."

"Ah! but she is alive to misery," replied the sympathizing girl, "and sinking beneath a load of hidden grief."

"True, my child, but that misery is of her own creating; that misery, in communication, might find relief."

Juliette shook her head in doubtful silence.—"Hers are not the sorrows of the heart," pursued the nun; "alas!

hers

hers are but the maddened conflicts of unruly and disappointed passions: even now, the insatiate fury of revenge rangles, and banishes every transient indication of remorse."

"Oh, no, no!" said Juliette; "sister Laurette is alive to remorse; now, even at this moment, it tears, it consumes her."

"The Virgin grant it!" aspirated the sister; "I could wish to see her bending beneath the unrelenting penance of self-infliction; I could wish to see her humbled to the lowest ebb of mortification and endurance!"

Juliette, shuddering, grasped the arm of the nun, and snatching the rosary which impended from her girdle, held to view the cross—"Sister," she demanded, "is not this the type of charity—the type of forgiveness? If she had

wronged, if she had injured you, then, even then——”

“I would pardon—I would pray for her,” interrupted the nun; “but she wrongs her own soul—she wars against the tenets of our most holy worship. Individual injuries may be forgiven, may be obliterated, but profanation——”

Juliette raised her finger to the lips of the speaker — “Stop, sister,” she exclaimed; “let the Power offended measure the transgression. Look into your own life, recall the early season of youth; when the heart elated, when the spirits, buoyed upon the tiptoe of expectation, beheld the coming years of promise, rich in the glowing colours of fascination; ah! think——”

“Daughter,” interrupted the nun, “the saints be praised, my life and the
life

life of the impenitent Laurette bears no similitude! she was dragged from sin, an unwilling sacrifice; mine was a voluntary renunciation; she forswore not the poison of the world's sensuality, nay, even now riots in the latitude of unlicensed thought."

"The heart, the seat of thought, defies the eye's scrutiny," said Juliette.

"True," resumed the nun, "but the actions, uncloaked by hypocrisy, betray each hidden impulse. Sister Laurette's tears are the tears of disappointment, the gallings of a spirit which spurns controul. Now would she fly her prison; now, could she snap her chains, would she return to a bondage more coercive—the bondage of sin. Yes, her mind is an alien to virtue and to piety, or why, with

cold, with chilling apathy, receive each studied proof of interest and favour?"

"Perhaps 'tis pride," remarked Juliette; "pride which, spurning compassion, classes contempt with pity."

"Pride alone would yield to conviction," replied sister Lucille; "pride may hoodwink the judgment, but it hardens not the heart; besides, pride does not stain with blood the visionary flights of fancy, neither does it start aghast and pallid at the sound of murder."

Juliette was silent; her powers to defend were lost: she remembered the scene she had witnessed, the words she had heard, when sleep had banished reserve; and though compassion checked censure, conviction condemned.

"You are silent," pursued the nun.

"Sister,"

“Sister,” replied Juliette, “my defence was not grounded in justification; for, alas! I must admit the effort unavailing.”

“It was grounded in philanthropy,” rejoined sister Lucille, as, with an approving smile, she extended her hand. “Would that the instigator, alive to the warm thrill of gratitude, would feel—would repay the motive! But her heart, my child, cast not in the same mould, owns not the same sway; and though we condemn its irregularities, though we lament its obduracy, still be our prayers offered up for its conversion.”

“Ah! may those prayers be heard! may those prayers be acceptable!” faltered Juliette; “may she yet live to see her error! may she yet live to atone for the past!”

“May

Vermándoís, when the lamp flashed a last exertion, and, dying, mingled all alike in darkness, that his slumber was broken by the sudden opening of his chamber-door. Quick was the breathing of the intruder, heavy his step as he tottered towards the bed—"Save me! save me!" he exclaimed, and then he sank, exhausted, panting.

Theodóre started. It was the voice of Montaubán—"Save you!" he repeated, "from what? from whom?"

"*From conscience,*" lingered a voice in the corridor.

Montaubán groaned in horror.

Theodóre sprung from the bed; he would have rushed to the door, he would have sought the mysterious speaker; but the imploring accents of his father restrained him.

"Stay!

“ Stay ! stay ! ” he faltered, and his palsied hand firmly grasped the arm of the youth.

“ Wherefore should I stay ? ” demanded Theodore ; “ ’twas from the corridor that the voice proceeded. I fear it not ; suffer me then——”

“ No, no, ” fell from the lips of the bandit. “ Thrice beneath this accursed roof has it burst upon my sight. Theodore, ’tis the spectre of——” He paused ; then, in broken accents, murmured——“ Stir not ; yet for a light I would give the universe.”

“ *Repentance and atonement is thine to give,* ” breathed forth the same terror-striking accents.

The nerveless arm of the bandit dropped powerless ; and Theodore, lost to every fear, alive but to the impulse of
curiosity,

curiosity, hurried into the corridor. Darkness was spread around, save the lamp's partial ray, which still burned in the distant chamber of Montauban. The door was half open, and, as a saffron road, its reflection crossed the gallery. Theodore paused involuntarily; for suddenly it became darkened, a shadow quickly crossed it, and then succeeded the light tread of careful footsteps. He pressed forward, he gazed o'er the balustrades; but the stairs being spiral, the object of his search was lost. Entering the apartment of the bandit, he snatched the lamp, and eagerly advancing, without hesitation descended the stairs. Their flight terminated in a stone passage, long, arched, and narrow. He waved high the lamp, his eyes pierced the darkness with eager solicitude, but as far as they could penetrate,

trate, appeared silent and forsaken. Still his resolution was unchanged; and with a heart firm in the cause, uninfluenced by local apprehensions, he attained the extremity of the passage. It separated. In a transverse direction, it branched off; the one led to the court-yard, the other to the interior of the castle. He paused irresolute, but instantly his election was decided, for the sound of a closing door pointed to the outward entrance.

Theodore reached the low portal; he pulled it with incautious haste, for as it yielded to his strength, the gathering current of external air extinguished his lamp. At first he felt not the privation, for the moon's silver beams pierced into the court-yard, and reflected the gigantic outline of the building. He saw the tall pines waving o'er the battlements, and
the

the turretted watch-towers, peering, as it were, amid their shades. Undetermined whether to advance or to retreat, his hand still grasped the door, and his eyes still wandered in search of the object of his pursuit : suddenly he sprung forward, for beneath the gloom of an archway, opening at the base of an outer watch-tower, to command and defend the rocky pass to the main entrance of the castle, he distinguished a human form. It appeared wrapped in the garb of some religious order. It was tall, it was thin, it was almost shadowy ; and as it leaned against the rude wall, the cowl darkening o'er its features, it conveyed in its appearance a something terrific—a something superhuman. Theodore's eyes seemed fixed upon the figure, yet, when he reached the archway, it was gone.

He

He heard no footstep, he saw no trace; and when he called, the echo of his own voice alone responded. His pride spurned at the weakness of superstition, yet did the faint flutter of his heart, the sudden agitation of his feelings, give name to his sensations.

That the mysterious object of his pursuit had shrunk within the covert of the archway, he felt assured; for the light of the moon prohibited the possibility of unnoticed egress; but whether to pierce its gloom, and pursue the adventure, or whether to leave it in obscurity, was a strong debate between reason and curiosity. The one argued the danger of temerity, the other pictured the probability of gratification. Reason boasted no empire o'er the mind of our hero; for though his judgment was strong, and his mind
compre-

comprehensive, yet his feelings were alive to impetuosity, and his heart ever governed by impulse. The reflection of being unarmed, of being cut off from succour, of throwing himself into the very fangs of unknown power, biassed not the deliberation; and when a slight noise from above aroused the eagerness of attention, he darted beneath the archway, and, spite of darkness, groped his passage. Carefully he stepped, for he had proceeded beyond the light of the moonbeams, and frequently he paused to listen. Once the sound of a footfall spurred on to the pursuit; and once the quick breathing of nearly-exhausted strength spoke his approach to the unknown. He sprung to the supposed spot, rich in imagined triumph; but his searching hand met but the damp wall,
and

and the breathing itself ceased—" *Search no further,*" exclaimed a voice, "*for danger and peril lurk around.*"

"Speak," implored Theodore, "and explain your mysterious errand." But no answer was returned. "Speak," he continued; "point out the danger I should shun."

"*Montauban,*" softly rejoined the voice.

"My father! Merciful Heaven! my father!" faltered the youth.

"*Fly him,*" rejoined the warner; "*accursed and fatal as the blast of death!*"

Theodore gasped for breath; he leant against the wall, and not till the rustlings of a garment, betrayed the flight of the intruder, did he recover his self-command. Again he vehemently conjured an explanation; but the stillness of
of

of death prevailed—"Stranger," he exclaimed, "if you have mercy, stay and answer me." But the intruder was gone, at least surrounding darkness baffled all attempts at discovery, and no sound betrayed his continuance. Still at a loss how to act, he again paused, for he had reached the termination of the passage, and stood at the base of a spiral staircase, leading to the chambers above.

"You are sought after," articulated the same voice; "tarry longer, and the power to save will be lost."

"What power?" again demanded Theodore.

"*That which Heaven vests in the hands of innocence,*" was the response, and then again it ceased.

"How can I exert that power?" questioned

tioned our hero ; “ how can I discover the object who would claim it ? ”

“ *Seek her beneath the archway,* ” replied the voice. “ *To-morrow night, when, wearied with excess, the troop shall be lost in forgetfulness, watch the opportunity, and repair hither.* ”

“ For what ? for whom ? ” implored Theodore.

“ *Fly,* ” whispered the unknown ; “ *let not the eye of suspicion glance upon your movements ; fly to the castle ; elude the vigilance of Montauban ; disobedience is virtue, for you alone can ward the blow of murder.* ”

Theodore shuddered.

“ *Fly,* ” continued the voice. “ *Remember to-morrow’s midnight : be punctual ; be diligent.* ”

Theodore

Theodore heard no more. Embarked in a new project, he yielded to the counsels of an unknown guide, and fled the archway. He paused not in the courtyard. He had been warned of the necessity of caution; and, with a mind occupied with the mysterious occurrences of the past hour, he reentered the castle.

His own name, vociferated by the bandit, was the first sound which met his ear; and to his response succeeded the muttered curses of anger. Theodore, undaunted, met the gathering tempest of his rage, and blunted e'en his fury by the forbearing quiet of endurance.

"Did you see it?" demanded Montauban, when the first burst of reproach gave place to inquiry.

"I saw the outline of a figure," re-
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plied the youth, "muffled in a monk's cowl and scapular."

The bandit shuddered; he looked fearfully around—"Did you see the face?" he again questioned.

"No, he fled as I pursued; and, when I thought to grasp him, he glided past me with a facility scarcely human."

Again Montauban started; he feared to betray too much, and yet he longed to question further.

"I am not superstitious," pursued the youth, "yet my reason almost yields to the whispers of credulity. Why it should haunt my quiet, I have yet to learn: it cannot come in reproach, for my conscience records no deed to warrant the suggestion."

Again the life's-blood fled the cheeks
of

of Montauban; his eyes glanced horribly on the youth, and his lips murmured inarticulate sounds.

"Father, are you ill?" demanded the alarmed Theodore; "or may I hail the blessed epoch of remorse?"

The bandit answered not; he shrunk from the piercing glance of his son, and folded his arms in deep abstraction. Theodore attempted to speak; but Montauban motioned silence. The youth watched him with anxious solicitude; no glow of affection marked his feelings; yet did pity and sorrow occupy his heart; pity, for the perpetration of crimes which barred the reach of reparation; and sorrow, for the claim which nature held upon his feelings—"He wore the cowl and scapular of a monk," at length faltered Montauban, scarce daring to glance

around the chamber. "Say, did he fly in silence? did he not speak his errand?"

"The monk proclaimed the errand of peace," replied Theodore.

"Hah! what else did he proclaim? Go on; explain, boy; did he linger o'er the deeds of the past?—did he say ought of *the confessional of Valombre*? did he say 'twas his resistance which unsheathed the dagger? did he say 'twas his obduracy which provoked the stroke?"

"Oh, no; he comes not to arraign," replied the shuddering Theodore; "he comes to admonish: he comes, on the mission of love, to point out, to enjoin the blessed clause of repentance. Father, heed, attend, yield to his counsels, and he will redeem, he will save you; he will soften the keen reflections of the past,

past,

and the future he will deck in peace. Say, may I hope, may I hail this visitation the happy prelude——”

“Peace, boy!” interrupted the bandit, and as he snatched his hand from the imploring grasp of Theodore, the chilling frown which lowered on his brow enforced command.

Disappointed, desponding, the youth moved towards the door. His heart was full, yet he wished to veil his feelings; for the tear of sensibility ever excited the brutal laugh of derision.

“Stay,” thundered Montauban, whose coward soul shudderingly anticipated the return of the spectre-monk. “Heard you no sound in the corridor? Hark! again; sure 'tis footsteps.”

“'Twas Fancy,” replied Theodore; “her powers are unlimited.”

"True," said Montauban, still listening, and then with a half sigh, he concluded—"Would all alike were fanny!"

"The past?" eagerly questioned Theodore; but the bandit answered not. Again did his hands shut out external objects, for the door of the apartment opened; and not till the voice of Randolphe indicated safety could he again look up.

"Merciful Powers!" thought Theodore, when, left to his own reflections, he could recall the past, "how tyrannic is the sway of vice! how galling the fetters her despotic reign imposes! and yet thousands, unresisting, hurried away by subduing passions, are borne down the stream of infatuation, are overwhelmed, are destroyed. 'Tis the first step, which youth should shun; for often, alas!

often

often is the first deviation, the first lapse conclusive. Yes, dear, tender, excellent friend of my inexperience, thy counsels are prophetic: a parent lives, the sad memorial that vice, like a hardy plant, spreads a thousand, thousand shoots in the lone heart which gives it entrance."

From the calm satisfaction which ever accompanied the reflection of father Betsolin's parental care, his mind, reverting to the strange events of the past hour, dwelt, with new-awakening conjecture, on the enterprize in which he had engaged.

To account for the mysterious circumstance baffled all his endeavours; and the more he reflected, the more was he lost. It was the same voice he had heard on his first entrance beneath the roof of

Vernandois: then it warned him of danger to himself, now it solicited mercy for another. How mercy should be in his hands, how the possibility to save should be vested in one so powerless, filled him with wonder and conjecture. His imagination awed, his curiosity excited, by the veil of mystery which shrouded the movements of the unknown, prepared him for some event beyond the reach of common conjecture. His understanding was sufficiently strong to despise the mere whispers of superstition; yet had his mind so early imbibed the tincture of romance, that he could not trace the impending incident to any natural explanation.

The broad glare of day dissipated the apprehensions of Montauban: spectres glide not beneath the sunbeams; for it

is conscience which decks night in terrors. He joined the marauders in fresh enterprises of danger, and wandered amidst their usual haunts, with a spirit apparently unbroken. Not so the sensitive mind of our hero; he, alas! experienced no variation; the cloudless firmament, the brilliant sun, cheered not his sadness, nor snatched from care one thought; for the heart, absorbed in its own sorrows, lingering o'er the catalogue of its own difficulties, feels dead alike to external charms and external allurements. Left the uncurbed range of the castle's vast extent, for, save Handolphe, the banditti had quitted the fortress, Theodore, with listless inquietude, wandered o'er the desolated chambers, often pausing, with eye attracted by the burnished glare of some defaced ornament,

ment, and often straying from his own peculiar fate, to muse with wonder at Vermandois' strange desertion, once the favoured residence of a titled race, now the rude haunt of fierce and lawless robbers. He had reached the extremity of a stone gallery, extending along the east front of the castle, and decorated with the rich exuberance of the artist's fancy. One form, done countenance, the most attracted his attention; it was the beautiful semblance of a matron, on whose white bosom a sleeping boy reclined. The smile of maternal exultation glowed upon the canvas, as her snowy hand seemed in the act of parting the golden ringlets on the forehead of the child.

"Ah!" exclaimed Theodore, as he gazed upon the picture, "how nature speaks in every perfect feature!—blessed

blessed cherub ! rich in a mother's love, thy hopes, thy opening years, thy gilded promises——” And then he paused, and starting at an unusual sound, turned quickly round, and beheld in the darkened corner of the gallery a battle-piece, agitated as though by some sudden gust. Scarce knowing what he sought, he sprang towards it, and, as he pushed aside the gilded frame, discovered, by an iron hinge, the concealed secret of a door. Pale with the anticipation of some new horror, yet eager to explore the hidden entrance, he removed entirely the encumbering obstacle, and pushing back the door, passed through its narrow archway, and again closed it. The passage in which he found himself was lower and narrower than the gallery he had quitted ; and the light's faint

faint unequal rays but sparingly admitted through a high and strongly-grated casement, now darkened, and thickly mantled with the spider's ingenious web. Drear and unsocial was the aspect, cheerless and disheartening its termination; for a second door, iron-incrusted, barred his passage, and alike yielded to his strength. The apartment beyond was furnished with every care which could add comfort to its inmate; naught, save liberty, appeared to have been wanting; and of that, alas! the strongly-barricaded door betrayed the dire banishment. Theodore shuddered, Theodore sympathetically felt the prisoner's pangs—
—“ Ah! how bitter is the captive's lot!” he thought, as seating himself on the low couch, he fixed his eyes on the grated casement. “ Often on this same
couch

couch hast thou reclined, poor mourner ! and watched the lagging flight of hours, which could bring no change ! often mused o'er thy sorrows ! often, with indignant start, cursed the fell power which chained thee down ! often prayed the saints to give thee freedom, even leagued with death ! and yet a captive still." Theodore's tears dimmed e'en the little light which found an entrance. " Perhaps," he continued, dashing the truant drops from his cheek, " perhaps rich in the social claims of kindred—a father—a husband—perhaps——"

The thought was too painful : he started from the couch ; he traversed the apartment. Ah ! how did his horror, how did his commiseration rise, when casting his eyes on the floor, he distinguished the track of the murderer, he marked

marked the trace of blood ! it dyed the threshold of a door, which till now had escaped his observation. His heart sickened, but his resolution did not relax; and with that desperation of feeling which dares, which braves the worst, he burst it open, and entered the chamber. Its appearance spoke it the sleeping-room of the ill-fated prisoner; but that prisoner was not, as imagination had pourtrayed, a father, a husband; that prisoner, for the scattered garments betrayed the sex, had been armed in a female's pleading helplessness; yet unpietied, unaided; had she fallen beneath the murderer's stroke—" God ! avenging God !" burst from the livid lips of the youth; as, rivetted to the spot, he gazed upon the crimson-stained coverlet, which, rudely torn aside, showed even the impression

pression of the form, which, from the sleep of wearied nature, had passed to the sleep eternal.

Fain would I paint my hero's quick-revolving thoughts; fain linger o'er the bust of indignation, the thrill of horror, and the subduing tide of soft compassion, but that the power of language would the effort mar, and spoil the interest I would here excite. 'Tis for the pencil to perpetuate the gust of passion; the pen, with lesser strides, must be content to trace effect. Forgive me, lady, for claiming then our sex's genuine fancy; nor blame an author, when she taxes them, to save the imputation on ability.

The quondam turned from the bed: every glance he cast around the chamber increased the sadness of his thoughts. A

rosary

rosary lay upon the table, as also an ink-stand, and near it a torn paper. He flew to seize the imagined elucidation, for interest whispered the name, the sufferings of the murdered prisoner alike revealed. The ink was pale, the characters scarcely legible; yet, with eager eyes, did he peruse the contents. Ah! no; it was no complement of injuries, no transcript of a heart's unvarnished sorrows; it was more in the style of a confession, and seemed to breathe the pure spirit of penitence—"One more revolving year, and these eyes shall no longer behold this scene of terror, shall no longer gaze on this record of transgression. And will thy pale ghost be appeased? Lady—murdered angel! will thy appalling voice no more be heard in the thunders? will thy shade no more pursue my steps? no more

more pierce the gloom, and hover o'er
 my wanderings? will this brain be calm?
 will this heart be still? will the past yield
 to the future? will mercy find the open-
 ing scene? Ah, say! ah, tell me! will
 penitence * * * * * No, no;
 accursed wretch! my doom is cast, thy
 life is waning; and when is death, when
 mouldering, from art laid * * * * *
 * * * * *
 Blood! thy my blood will be washed
 away; that prayer and infliction will
 bleach it white as the mountain snow;
 yet, yet is the stain still crimson * * *
 * * * * * Holy and
 blessed saints! I have wept, I have watch-
 ed, I have prayed, I have mortified each
 rebellious thought, until my spirit, and
 my health, alike is broken. Yes, on my
 knees have I watched the five-long nights;
 when nature craved, have I resisted food;

when fever scorched my lips, have I turned
 from the tempting cup. * * *

* * * * *

* * * * * Oh God ! oh God ! aid—
 give me one token of returning favour !

* * * * *

* * * * * I have wandered from the
 haunts of men, I have plunged into soli-
 tudes where misery alone could enter.

At night, stretched upon the earth, have

I watched the return of morning ; and

then have I arisen, wet with the pendent

dew. Ah ! what did it avail ? Nought

but sickness, pain, and suffering. Fool !

weak fool ! it was the spirit, not the

flesh, which wanted humbling ; it was

the erring heart which needed the bridle

of restraint. Here have I sought it ;

within this chamber—by the side of the

bed where last reclined——”

The paper dropped from the hand of

Theodore.

Theodore. It was torn, it was rudely severed, where anxiety sought solution. "Unhappy wretch!" he murmured, retreating from the appalling scene. "Slave of irremediable, of gnawing woe! Blest be thy victim! Keener, keener far on thy black soul, rankles the stroke of death, than what thy murderous hand, didst unreluctantly inflict: one moment closed the pangs, the struggles of the prisoner, while thine, through ages are protracted."

Sympathizing in the wrongs, in the sufferings of its late unfortunate inmate, shuddering at the coercion, the abuses of power, and the hopeless, the lingering inaction of captivity, Theodore returned to the gallery, replaced the picture, and again, paused to examine the portrait, which had before fascinated his attention.

Each

Each succeeding glance augmented his interest; it was more than common admiration; it was more than mere curiosity; his heart seemed absorbed in the contemplation; and ever and anon, when time warned him to quit the gallery, did his eyes linger a reluctant adieu. Yet did not the features bear the slightest similitude to the lady Juliette; they were soft, they were interestingly lovely; but the same peachy down of youth mantled not their expression; the one was as the vernal bloom of spring, the other rich in the mellowing tints of summer.

On returning to the inhabited chambers of the castle, Theodore found Randolphe still alone, still awaiting his associates.

“By St. Benedict! I thought the spectre-monk had spirited you from Vermandois,”

dois," exclaimed the robber: "in truth, 'tis a strange taste to go moping, and exploring, and telling beads, and muttering credoes, as though your soul was black with sin. Why, boy, if Montauban's was as white, I query whether his sleep would not be sounder."

Theodore breathed a heavy sigh.

"Come, shake off that cast of care," pursued Rodolphe, laughing; "a penitentiary savours death, and death savours the devil."

Theodore shuddered.

"A cowl and a shorn crown, and by the mass! father Theodore stands before us," continued the robber. "Come, be lenient, and name the purchase of absolution?"

"Repentance and atonement," mournfully replied the youth. "Ah, mistaken

Rodolphe!

Randolphe ! the hour will come, when, owning the fallacy of sin, you will lament, vainly lament the undying record of transgression ! Remember, to contrition Heaven promises favour ; but man, persevering in his crimes, bars the clause of mercy."

"Preach on, and be installed an abbot," replied Randolphe, in an ironical tone. "Who shall compose the fraternity ? Say, to what office will your reverence nominate me ?"

Theodore turned from him in disgust.

"Nay, you are a strange boy," pursued the robber, "to prefer the stale restrictions of the fathers, to a life which owns no law but inclination ! Marry ! many a monk would doff the cowl to share our freedom ; and for our sacristy, we could more than purchase a release
from

from purgatory, for every soul who has bled in our cause."

"Think you," demanded Theodore, "the accumulated treasures of a life of plunder could bribe one ray of favour?" The tears, the blood, the sufferings of the injured, forbid all purchase, save long years of penance."

"Then do they bar the effort," rejoined Randolphe. "A calling like ours warrants no dependence on a month, much less years. Hard blows are often dealt, and who can name the head that's to receive them? I have fought some years beneath Montauban's banner; and though, save this scratch," drawing his hand o'er a deep scar on his forehead, "I've been dame Fortune's favourite, yet I've seen spirits who dared the devil, humbled, chop-fallen."

"Did

"Did not their fate awe you?" interrogated Theodore.

"Awe!" contemptuously repeated Randolph; "no, no, they nerved our courage, and bid us seek revenge."

"Nor e'en the ritual of religion gave them burial," mournfully observed the youth: "lost, wretched beings!"

"Dost think," interrupted Randolph, with a half-smothered laugh, "that the muttered psalmody of a friar would speed their flight to heaven? what a jot the better is the soul for all the masses and requiems which credulity chants, and superstition offers?"

Theodore's spirits rose in indignation, yet did he maintain silence. What could he substantiate, by entering the lists with one so profane, so hardened? Not the faintest glimmer of conversion promised

to

to second his labour; and to hear the loose ribaldry of abuse levelled at rites he had been taught to worship, filled his soul with sickening disquietude.

Again he sought security in flight; for solitude was preferable to an intercourse with a mind so uncongenial.

The day wore away, and still the banditti returned not. Theodore felt no uneasiness, for he felt no affection; and where but with affection does anxiety dwell? It was his mysterious appointment, his intended visit to the watch-tower, which most occupied his attention; he panted for the moment of elucidation, and watched the progressive flight of the hours with an impatience which spoke his interest; yet was the sun but slowly setting, and midnight was the period.

How long the space which expectation mourn'd !

Theodore descended from the battlements. He sought a change of scene; he fled the castle, he wandered beyond the pine-forest, he mounted the craggy steep, from whose giant height he had first beheld the grey turrets of Vermandois, and gazed on the far-spreading landscape on the opposite side. His eyes, ranging o'er the mingled outline of mountains, cliffs, and forests, wandered from the awful grandeur of stupendous wildness, to the mellowing gradations of vegetation. Shagged with pine and darkening cypress, he beheld precipices of granite, scowling o'er glens of aromatic herbage, dotted by the soft blowing cistus, and shadowed by thickets of olives, almonds, and olianders. He traced the impetuous velocity of gathering
ing

ing streams, foaming, fretting midst impending rocks and broken fissures, now rolling in glassy mildness—now, by resistance, swelling into strength, and dashing high their misty columns of spray.

Impressed with wonder, with awe, with admiration, Theodore continued to gaze upon the almost insurmountable ramparts of Nature, till each fantastic summit, losing the golden tint of sunset, mingled into one long line of shade. The profound silence, the deep repose, which, with the dubious tints of evening, mantled each feature of the landscape, impressed with solemn sadness the thoughtful mind of our hero. Often, at this same hour, had he listened to the deep, full swell of holy praise; often shed the tear of piety, in the solemn

pauses of soul-moving minstrelsy. Again the vesper choir seemed to swell upon his ear, again it seemed to linger, as midst the cloistered arches of Valombre. Alas! 'twas fancy all—fancy, which peopled the twilight gloom, and habited ideal images in the dusky garb of religion—fancy, which recalled the past, and blotted out the present from remembrance.

No fear marked his descent from the mountains, though sometimes tottering on the brink of perpendicular precipices, sometimes passing beneath excavated rocks, whose gigantic masses hung threatening overhead. Deep was the gloom of the pine-forest, awe-striking the sombre shadow of its close-intwining branches; yet Theodore, wrapped in the thoughtfulness of reflection, passed quickly

on;

on ; and when, by the given signal, the drawbridge was lowered, he entered the court-yard, panting but for the coming hour of explanation.

END OF VOL. II.

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