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GRASVILLE ABBEY:

A ROMANCE.



GRASVILLE ABBEY:

A ROMANCE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

“ See yonder hallow’d fane! the pious work
“ Of names once fam’d, now dubious or forgot,
“ And buried ’midst the wreck of things which were.”

THE GRAVE.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. G. AND J. ROBINSON,
PATERNOSTER-RROW;
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1801.



GRASVILLE ABBEY.

CHAPTER XXI.

ADVENTURES.

“ O Peace ! thou source and soul of social life,
Beneath whose calm-inspiring influence,
Science her views enlarges, Art refines,
And swelling Commerce opens all her ports ;
Blest be the man divine who gives us thee !”

THOMSON.

WHEN men of honour, whose principles and dispositions are naturally just, fall under misfortunes, and experience adversity and disappointment, their feelings suffer a far greater shock than can be felt by those who, from childhood, have been plunged in irregularities,

gularities, and are well practised in the arts of meanness and deceit.

The sting of remorse seldom lasts longer than that punishment which they bring upon themselves through perpetual indiscretion and deliberate schemes of villany;—while the man who has been merely led away by example or youthful follies, receives with redoubled force that blow which stabs at once his character and reputation. Nor can he, though the clouds of despair, which encompassed him, may be succeeded by the sunshine of prosperity, think of disagreeable events at a former part of life, but with anguish and distress.

Of the numberless griefs and afflictions to which human nature is subject, poverty is held up as one of a considerable magnitude; it generally procures contempt and ill-treatment from the
haughty

haughty sons of wealth ; and the opinion of the world in general is by no means favourable to those who are not possessors of riches and affluence. These mistaken and shameful ideas are almost too predominant in every country ; and the child of misery receives great addition to his woes by the sneers and scandal of his neighbours. Equality, though a word of terror to the great, if taken in its true meaning, implies sentiments of the most noble and generous kind ; instead of pulling down laws, and levelling the whole class of mankind, it would confirm unity, peace, and good order.

The rod of oppression too often falls upon that man who is unable, through misfortunes or peculiar circumstances, to raise himself against the weight ; but, crushed by its power, he sinks beneath the force of injustice, and is lost to his

God, his family, and himself; whereas, in the time of his sorrows, had he received comfort, succour, or assistance, he might have continued to have proved a valuable member of society.

Alfred Maserini meditated with painful ideas on those distresses which had happened, through his own misconduct, during the time they had been in England. He not only beheld himself surrounded with difficulties, but his sister, who was innocent of the cause, equally involved, through his errors and vices. Young, beautiful, and accomplished, she was but ill calculated to undergo the hardships of life; yet she submitted to them with resignation, and could even teach patience to him who had brought her to the present disquietude. This would cut him to the soul; and the scalding tear of repentance would often start from his eye, in defiance of
the

the many efforts he made to conceal it.

He was impetuous, proud, and courageous in his disposition; yet, in feelings he was a woman: nor was his pride of that nature to make him overlook affliction, although concealed in a hut of poverty and misery. But he laid too great a stress on the punctilios of honour and high birth; he valued the name he bore, with such ardour as to make him resent the least affront offered in the family to which it belonged.

Their arrival at Calais was attended with disagreeable and degrading circumstances, on account of their giving in their names, which were feigned ones, and the review of their baggage, which consisted of clothes and a few articles which Matilda had received from Mr. Milverne's valet; that gentle-

man having procured from sir Peter's what little goods she set a value on, and desired his servant to deliver them at Dover. Their travelling through France was in every respect extremely uncomfortable, and the difficulties they met with in consequence of their endeavouring to conceal themselves from vulgar curiosity, extremely distressing.

They had nearly arrived at the Alps, when they halted for the night at a small inn. The accommodation was very indifferent, and they were given to understand by the hostess that some English persons of distinction were then in the house, who took up the best rooms. They were therefore necessitated to put up with the inconvenience, and, after a scanty meal, retired to poor and desolate apartments. Both Alfred and Matilda, with Leonard, had, the last day's journey, rode on horses which the former

mer

mer purchased of a smuggler at a low price, considering that it would be the cheapest and most secret way of travelling. Leonard saw the cattle safely placed in a barn some distance from the house; the stables being occupied by the horses and servants of the persons whom the landlady had mentioned: he then laid himself down on a small bed in one corner of the building.

Leonard had not been asleep above two hours, before he was awakened by a glare of light which darted right on his eyes through an opening on one side of the barn. He immediately started up, and looking out at the door, perceived that the inn was in flames. He hurried on his clothes, and ran as fast as possible to the spot, in order to assist his master and young lady. By the time he got there, one part of the house was entirely burnt down, and

the remainder furrounded with flames : he was happy however to see his master and Matilda safe : and the former delivered to him the trunks, which he took care to place in security.

A number of peafants were affembled round, and each feemed to bewail the fituation of a young lady and her father, who fleep in thofe rooms which were on fire ; but no one dared to go to their affiftance, as the whole fabric was expected to fall in a few minutes. Nor was the general conjecture wrong, for in a very little time the front gave way, and fell ; which difcovered the internal part of the two rooms. They could fee nothing of the gentleman ; it was therefore fupposed that he was fuffocated, and had fallen among the ruins at the back part ; but the eyes of the fpectators experienced a moft horrid fight in the other apartment ; a young
lady

lady was standing in the middle of the flames. The agony such a situation must inspire, had made her insensible; her hands were clasped together, and her eyes lifted towards heaven. The people cried out to give her assistance; but none dared try the experiment, till Alfred, touched with compassion for the unfortunate female, sprang forward with a ladder, and placed it against the part of the building which was yet standing: he had ascended above half way, when the part where the ladder rested against broke from his weight; but he had rose far enough to perceive, to his astonishment, that it was lady Caroline Albourne.

At this sight, Alfred forgot all danger, and resolved to die or save her; he accordingly, when he found the steps fall from under him, clasped a post which supported the story, and with an

amazing agility sprang on the tottering floor of the room. He took her in his arms, but found no ladder set for his descent; the people were afraid to come near, on account of the falling in of the building, which would bury them in the ruins. He called to them; but his cries were vain; till Leonard, who was returned from conducting Matilda to a house a little distance from the spot, seeing his master in such a situation, ran for the ladder; but it was too late, for Alfred felt the place on which he stood, must sink with them, before he could get to the ground by that method: he therefore, with remarkable intrepidity, jumped from the part with lady Caroline in his arms, and fell on a feather bed which by chance had been thrown out at the beginning of the fire.

They were immediately dragged some distance off, and in one minute
after,

after, the whole fabric fell to the ground.

The situation of the unfortunate lady Caroline may be better imagined than described; for even when she had recovered from the insensibility which the thoughts of her danger had caused, it was but to experience new misery. Her father, without doubt, was buried in the ruins; she had not yet seen her deliverer, nor knew of the heroic courage that had been exerted in her behalf; for, from the moment the front of her chamber fell, she saw nor heard no more till her recovery in the house to which she had been conveyed.—She was now attended by several persons, and her own woman servant, who had slept in the back room, and leapt from the window at the first alarm.—At this period, while all were bewailing the loss of lord Albourne, he entered the

room, supported by two servants. Lady Caroline fainted, and afterwards fell into hysterics, occasioned by the joy of seeing her father, whom she considered as no more. He embraced her, and shed tears of paternal tenderness for the safety of his child.

His lordship, when awaked by the alarm of fire, knew it would be some time before he could enter his daughter's chamber, as she always bolted her door on the inside; and that the fright which so sudden an information might give her, would most likely prevent her from opening it at all; he therefore considered it would be best to get out at the back part as soon as possible and fly to her assistance in the front.— With this idea, he attempted to descend the stair-case, but found it in flames:—this sight drove him distracted.— Without waiting for help, he
jumped

jumped from the window, and was so hurt by the fall, that he lay insensible for some time; when one of his servants found him in that situation, and conducted him to the house which was occupied by the other sufferers.

Alfred Maserini, his sister, and Leonard, were in another apartment; they neither of them judged it expedient to appear before lord Albourne, his daughter, or any of the servants, for fear a sudden exclamation of their name should discover them to those who were about. They resolved, therefore, to remain private till morning, and then have an interview with his lordship. The fire being partly extinguished, the people dispersed, and quiet was in some measure restored.

At breakfast his lordship inquired in what manner his daughter escaped death.

death. They were both informed of the circumstances relative to the behaviour of the young gentleman who had so valiantly undertaken to rescue her; and heard not the repeated praises of the rustics unconcerned. Lord Albourne's heart, as well as his daughter's overflowed with gratitude, and they both requested to see him as soon as possible. The woman of the house said she would call him directly, for that he had desired to be alone the remainder of the night. She left her noble guests, and repaired to the room where Alfred slept. Having knocked several times without receiving any answer, she opened the door, and to her astonishment, found it empty. She immediately entered the chamber of his sister, and saw that was also deserted. The stables and loft, where Leonard slept, were also searched; but neither cattle nor man could be seen.

In

In Alfred's deserted apartment, they observed a note which lay on the table; it was directed to Lord Albourne: he received it, and the intelligence that the writer could no-where be found. His lordship read the following words;

“ TO LORD ALBOURNE.

“ MY LORD,

“ IF your lordship's curiosity should lead you to know the name of that man who saved your daughter from the flames, it may be satisfied by perusing these lines: the only return you can make him, is to keep it a secret; an unfortunate circumstance having occurred, that renders a decampment (both mean and dastardly) necessary; the manner of which is totally inconsistent with the character and equally against the inclinations of

“ ALFRED MASERINI.”

If

If lord Albourne was astonished at the elopement of lady Caroline's preserver, he was, if possible, far more surpris'd at the contents of this note; and although he felt the same obligation to him as to any other individual, yet he would rather have had lady Caroline's life saved by any other person. He concluded Alfred was in debt, and was therefore obliged to keep concealed. Lord Albourne was a nobleman of the nicest honour, and most generous sentiments; he could not therefore consider himself happy in being obliged to a man whose ill qualities he had only known, and, as a stranger to his real character, detested his principles. He strictly observed what was mentioned in the note, and made an excuse for the gentleman's sudden departure.

In private he acquainted his daughter with the truth. She shed tears: his
lordship

lordship started: "I hope, Caroline," said he with some warmth, "you encourage not a partiality for a man to whom I have many times declared a total dislike."

"Your lordship, surely, cannot blame these few marks of sensibility for one who has saved my life, and by that, I flatter myself, deserves your gratitude as well as your daughter's."

"My most sincere gratitude he certainly deserves," replied his lordship: "but yet I would rather he should have any recompense in the world than the affections of my child. You well know, Caroline, pride was never a leading trait in my character: I have never attempted to bias your inclinations respecting the choice of a husband, although you have had many noble offers. I therefore think I may reasonably

ably require your compliance in one point, which is never to marry a gamester: of this description Mr. Maferini is known to be; and by that title I never could own him a son-in-law."

Lady Caroline sighed: her understanding told her his lordship's arguments were just; but her heart informed her she must suffer in the acquiescence to them.

Lord Albourne remained near six weeks at that place, till he was quite recovered, and then pursued his journey slowly towards Italy.

CHAPTER XXII.

LORD Albourne had observed, from the first evening of his daughter's introduction at sir Peter Peviquil's, a growing partiality on her side towards the young Frenchman; and particular assiduities in his manner, which seemed calculated to gain the affections of any young lady to whom they were addressed.

His lordship, when thoroughly convinced these conjectures were well founded, determined to inquire more closely into the character and principles of his new acquaintance: he had received hints from several persons, that he was a man of no fortune; but wealth
was

was the least object of lord Albourne's consideration; his own income was affluent and noble, having, as an only son, inherited the whole estate and title of his father: he therefore wisely conceived that his child might find more substantial happiness in a good man, though with only a small patrimony, than by receiving a higher name and additional luxuries, as the wife of a dissipated man of quality.

Under these ideas his lordship scrutinized the conduct of Alfred Maserini. He heeded not the envious tongue of calumny, but determined to be himself a spectator of those vices that should render him unfit for an alliance with lady Caroline. But he found the general voice to be too true, and more than once saw him seated among notorious sharpers at a gaming-table. Disgusted at the sight, he resolved never to admit him

him in his family. Having informed his daughter of the resolution he had taken, he could perceive, by the manner of her receiving the declaration, that Love had on

“ Her bosom seiz'd : shame void of guilt,
The charming blush of innocence, esteem,
And admiration of her lover's flame,
By modesty exalted ; even a sense
Of self-approving beauty stole across
Her busy thought.”

THOMSON.

Lord Albourne was now seriously alarmed, and resolved on a sudden scheme, to break off at once the connection.

He had received advice to travel, on account of his health, which had been in a declining state for some months. He considered this as a good opportunity to comply with the wishes of his friends ;

friends ; and by taking lady Caroline with him, the novelties of other countries, distance, and separation, might break an acquaintance which threatened her happiness for ever.

He accordingly ordered the servants to deny their young lady, whenever Mr. Maserini should call that day ; and then gave immediate directions for a long journey, which he intended to take the next morning, having business of importance to transact in the country.

Lady Caroline was astonished, when she was requested by her father to accompany him, and prepare her wardrobe in as little time as possible.

“ Your lordship, I suppose, means to make no great stay : consequently I shall have little occasion for many dresses.”

“ If I find, Caroline,” returned lord Albourne,

Albourne, "that the air agrees with me, I may perhaps remain there some weeks, if not months; and in that case, shall without doubt wish for your company. You had, therefore, better order the chief part of your clothes to be packed up: even your writing and drawing implements I would advise you to take with you."

The young lady was still more surprised and vexed at the stay her father intended to make; but even to wish not to go with him, was, in her ideas, cruelty to a parent who had always been so tenderly attached to her.

The next day they took leave of London. Lady Caroline did not mention the circumstance of seeing Alfred at the turnpike-gate. At a late hour in the evening they entered Dover, and slept there that night. During supper, his
lordship

lordship opened his mind to his daughter—acquainted her with his motives for so suddenly leaving town, and his intentions of travelling through France and Italy, as he hoped change of climate would both benefit his health, and drive from her mind a man unworthy of her esteem.

“ You might, my dear Caroline,” concluded his lordship, “ have had reason to reproach me, had I listened to the tales of others ; but I had the evidence of my own senses, and therefore could not be mistaken, in observing Mr. Maserini to be a person who would in a course of time bring his wife to wretchedness.”

Lady Caroline made no answer : but her looks showed she thought her father’s proceedings right, although they were entirely against her own inclinations.

tions. The next morning they crossed over to Calais, and travelled slowly towards the Alps, when they stopped at that inn where our young adventurers arrived a few hours after.

It was not a wonder that lord Albourne should be chagrined at the note he received; when it informed him that the very man who had given him so much uneasiness, and on whose account he left England, had in a few days' time overtaken them, and, by a noble act of courage and generosity, bound himself by the strongest ties, to the gratitude of both his daughter and himself.

His lordship, however, was soon convinced that his supposition on the cause of Alfred's departure was ill founded; but his knowledge of the actual reason of it served, if possible, to hurt him

more than ever in that nobleman's opinion.

It will be now necessary to acquaint the reader with those circumstances that occasioned the young travellers' precipitate elopement from the inn.

Leonard was a second time going to retire to his bed, which was no better than a heap of straw placed by the side of his horses, when a large paper, stuck on the door of the stable, met his eye. Fatigued as he was, curiosity prompted him to hold up the lanthorn which he had in his hand, in order to read the contents; when, to his astonishment and horror, he perceived it to be an order for apprehending Alfred Maserini, as a deserter from his regiment, and a large reward to be given to any one who could produce him.

Astonished

Astonished and alarmed at this intelligence, he stood some moments motionless. Having in some degree recovered, he ran back to the house; fortunately, the entrance was not fastened, and he arrived, without difficulty, at his master's chamber. He knocked, and Alfred answered. Leonard begged to be admitted. No sooner had he entered the room, than he informed him of the advertisement which he had seen, and entreated his master to set off again immediately. "I am perfectly well acquainted, sir, with a way across the Alps, and will be bound to conduct you safe into Italy."

This information was the most severe trial Alfred had ever yet experienced; he now saw his character and honour ruined, his name branded as that of a coward, and even publicly exposed as a villain, by a reward to be given for his

C 2 person.

person. "Leonard," said he, half frantic, "take care of my sister, and I will this moment fly and deliver myself up to my country: then I will explain my motives for my present behaviour, and die in a manner that shall not disgrace my family."

"Alas, sir," answered Leonard, "consider my young lady. I am a poor man, and little able to afford her that protection you request: not but that I would die in her defence; yet I am afraid my exertions in her behalf would be only looked on with contempt."

Alfred was tortured with contending passions;—one moment, his honour made him resolve to give himself up a victim to the sentence of a deserter; but then, his sister in the power of count D'Ollifont, (who might recover) presented herself to his fancy; nor was the
idea

idea of lady Caroline absent from his mind. A hope, a distant hope, seemed to inspire him with a wish to fly once more ignobly from pursuit, and try his fortune in that part where his parents had experienced the most poignant distresses.

Leonard was overjoyed at this resolution, and directly crept down stairs to the stable in order to prepare the horses; and Alfred promised to follow in a little time. Having knocked at the door of his sister's apartment, he requested in a low voice that she would rise immediately, dress herself, take every thing out of the room that belonged to her, and come to his chamber.

Matilda was astonished; but it was not a time for inquiries; she accordingly did as he desired, as soon as possible. In the mean time, he wrote with
a pen-

a pencil those few lines that were delivered to lord Albourne. Being joined by his sister, he took their trunk, and led her to the stable; when being placed on her horse, they departed with as much expedition as the darkness of the morning would permit.

There was not a doubt but that an order from France for Alfred's return to his regiment, at a very short notice, had been sent a few hours after he left his lodgings; but still to advertise him as a deserter, was a method equally strange and uncommon. — In short, count D'Ollifont's interference seemed to appear in the affair; and they greatly suspected that it was through his friends, some of whom were superior officers, and others in great favour at court, that such cruel proceedings were occasioned.

Alfred remained in a deep rêverie;
and

and it was from Leonard that his sister learnt the reason for so sudden and unaccountable a flight. They were some miles from the house by day-light, and halted at a small cottage for some refreshment, before they began their journey on the Alps.—They had here, fortunately, an opportunity of changing the three horses for two mules, and a kind of carriage which would be more convenient and safe for Matilda to travel in ; and also prevent remarks, which the sight of other animals might have occasioned among the peasants.

In about an hour, they again set off, and Leonard acted as driver the chief part of the way.

Nothing particular occurred during their journey across the Alps, which was extremely difficult and tedious, except a visible alteration in Alfred's

health for the worse, and a settled deep melancholy in his sister, which threatened a total decline in her constitution.—Leonard in vain strove to point out to them the beauties of the country, and the romantic scenery which surrounded them; their own misfortunes engrossed every idea; and the cloud of misery, which had so long been gathering over their heads, seemed now ready to burst with full force and horror.—Their arrival in Italy was productive of little joy or comfort, as they had every reason to suppose the same papers had been published through that country. They secreted themselves as well as possible, at every place where they stopped, using the nicest economy for fear of exhausting their little store; which, although it might last them a considerable time with frugality—yet, with extravagance, could be but of short duration.

Alfred

Alfred had resolved in his own mind, from their first setting off from Dover, to visit Grasville Abbey;—he now considered it would be a place of great service in point of secreting them from their enemies, as there was little doubt but superstition had kept it entirely free from inhabitants or curious visitors.— But these intentions he determined to keep from the knowledge of Matilda; for he well knew the idea of residing there would add greatly to those sufferings she already experienced: and the circumstances of the light in the west tower,—the noise which was heard by their father,—and his remarkable disappearance,—were subjects which his sister dwelt on with horror, whenever she read the manuscript of her aunt.— But he hoped to persuade her to remain there for some little time, and then considered that she would soon

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become

become comfortable in it, even as a place of abode.

Leonard well knew the roads that led to the Abbey, as he had often seen it when young, and could well remember the hospitality and goodness of the old count Maserini. To him Alfred privately conveyed his intentions, and requested him to bring them to the mansion on a sudden, and unknown to Matilda. The man seemed hurt on account of his young lady, and begged leave to remind him that it would be cruel to distress her, when she needed no more occasions for terror, or alarm.

“ I thank you for the caution,” returned Alfred coolly: “ but am not yet so great a villain, as to behave in the manner you suppose.”

Leonard

Leonard looked confused; his master continued—

“ I will not even propose a favourable argument to keep her there against her own inclination. But you must agree that if Matilda could divest herself of idle terrors, and acquiesce in the plan, it would in every respect be particularly fortunate, both in preserving our little property, and concealing us from the eye of malice or contempt.”

With these intentions they rode some leagues each day, and on the fifth morning from their first entering Italy, found themselves within six hours' travelling of Grasville Abbey. The clouds seemed to indicate an approaching storm; rain fell in large drops, and several claps of thunder were heard at a distance. Matilda was alarmed, and begged they might alight at some place

where they might find shelter till the tempest should in some degree abate.— In vain they looked round for a cottage or hovel to answer their purpose ; no such place could be seen ; when their attention was called off by the sight of a young girl, seemingly about sixteen.—Her hands were clasped, and her eyes lifted towards heaven.—Her appearance showed both terror and distress. Leonard drove to the spot where she stood, and Alfred offered the shelter of their vehicle, which she accepted with joy ; and by her thanks for their kindness, they perceived she was a native of France. Matilda inquired to what part she was going.—She answered with an unaffected simplicity, “ Any where.”—They were both astonished at the reply, but restrained their curiosity, and desired Leonard to drive on.

The storm had now blown over,
though

though the clouds were still gloomy and unsettled; but the latter part of the day, they again joined, and seemed to foretell another war of elements.— Vivid flashes of white lightning darted on the ground, and loud claps of thunder (which was now much nearer) burst over their heads. Matilda declared she would rather put up with any situation, than travel while it lasted; and Agnes (which was the name of the young girl) was extremely terrified.— At that moment they perceived the turrets of Grasville Abbey rise above the trees which surrounded it. Alfred ordered Leonard to drive immediately to it.

Matilda shuddered, yet was ashamed to confess her fears. It was now nearly dark, and they entered a grove of ancient cedars, that led to the front gate. The lightning was horrid, and the

the thunder seemed to shake even the centre of the earth; both Agnes and Matilda were nearly insensible, when the carriage stopped before the Abbey.—One wing seemed entirely in ruins; but they had no time for observations. Leonard had not quitted the mule he rode on two minutes before the animal was struck dead at his feet; and each expected the same fate.—Alfred flew to the gates, and being assisted by his servant, after some efforts, they yielded to their strength, and burst open, being unlocked.

Leonard drove the carriage into the court; having pushed against the heavy folding doors that led to the internal part, they easily opened, but with a considerable noise that confirmed no one had entered this dreary mansion, for many years. Agnes and Matilda were carried.

carried into the hall, and the mule and vehicle put under a piazza.

Leonard having kindled a fire on the pavement with some faggots by the help of a tinder-box which he had in his pocket, the party were in some measure recovered, and looked with horror on the gloomy and desolate appearance of the place that gave them shelter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TERROR.

“ Light thickens, and the crow
 Makes wing to the rooky wood ;
 Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
 While night's black agents to their prey do
 rouse.

Thou marvell'ft at my words: but hold thee ftill :
 Things bad begun, make ftiong themfelves by
 ill.

So pray thee go with me.”

MACBETH.

SUPERSTITION (though greatly encouraged by idle converfation and fabulous tales) is natural to mankind, and often inhabits the breafts of thofe whose valour and intrepidity in other refpects have been equally known and experienced.

It

It produces terrors, of all others the most to be dreaded and strove against;—for although they cannot be entirely overcome, yet, by giving the least way to them, life is at once made uncomfortable and disagreeable.

From childhood we are taught to believe in the reality of preternatural apparitions, by the prattle and simple stories of those, who, in general, abuse their care of children, by instilling into their young minds terrific and horrid ideas. As age advances, they are more likely to increase than decline;—and the number of relations seemingly authentic, which are continually in circulation, serve greatly to confirm the horrors of imagination.—Whether such histories proceed from the visionary remorse of guilty consciences,—from affectation, or the tongue of falsehood,—from insanity, weakness, or oppression of spirits,—

rits,—from nervous disorders, or romantic thoughts and contrivances—is as difficult to be ascertained, as equally whether some of them are not actually true, and the works of a Supreme Deity, for wise and unknown ends.—Many men of great learning and genius have differed widely on this point: and though even the immortal Addison could not positively give a decisive opinion on those topics, yet his words on the subject will ever be remembered and admired.

“ I know but one way of fortifying my soul against these gloomy presages and terrors of mind; and that is by securing to myself the friendship and protection of that Being, who disposes of events, and governs futurity. He sees at one view the whole thread of my existence, not only that part of it which I have already passed through, but that
which

which runs forward into all the depths of eternity. When I lay me down to sleep, I recommend myself to his care; when I awake, I give myself up to his direction. Amidst all the evils that threaten me, I will look up to him for help, and question not but he will either avert them, or turn them to my advantage. Though I know neither the time nor the manner of the death I am to die, I am not at all solicitous about it—because I am sure that he knows them both, and that he will not fail to comfort and support me under them.*”

Grafville Abbey was situated near Montferrat in Italy, and but a little distance from the Gulf of Genoa; its lofty turrets, on one side, commanded a view of Piedmont, and the prospect was bounded by the towering and majestic

* Spectator. No. VII.

jestic fummits of the Alps.—The other wing looked over the perspective scenery of Parma, Placenza, Mirandola, and the river Po, while at the extemity of the prospect, in an oblique view, Venice might just be observed. The back front looked over Valentia, Casal, and Vercelli, and terminated in a distant sight of Savoy.

But none of these countries could be seen but from the top casements of the two towers; the lower part of the Abbey being entirely surrounded by thick foliage, pines, and cypress-trees, with many ancient cedars.

The building was in every respect calculated to inspire awe and solemnity, both in the external and internal appearance. After the death of the count Maserini, many strange accounts were talked of by the peasants; and
count

count D'Ollifont's sudden departure from it, at the funeral of his uncle, seemed to confirm those reports that had before been circulated through the surrounding country. From that time it was shut up, without any of the furniture being removed; and no one had been known to enter it till signor Maserini, son to the late count, and father to Alfred and Matilda.— His sudden and remarkable disappearance raised the horror of the place, if possible, more than ever; even those who had before laughed at the superstition of their neighbours, were extremely alarmed at so dreadful and uncommon an occurrence. No person ever walked beyond the entrance of the grove that led to the gates; and the only human habitation that stood near it, was a cell which contained an old hermit, who had lived there ever since the Abbey had been forsaken, and sub-

subsisted on the charity of the neighbouring cottagers.

The travellers remained in the hall till day-light, when the storm abated, and they began to wish for some repose. Leonard pulled two arm chairs, which stood in a recess, towards the fire, and Agnes and Matilda strove to sleep in them; while Alfred and his servant laid themselves down on an old bench that stood near the spot. After some hours they awoke, and found themselves much refreshed. Leonard was immediately dispatched to see that the gates were close in the same manner as they were before, to prevent suspicion of any one having passed them.

They then opened their portmanteau, and found they had provisions for that day: this circumstance was extremely fortunate, as they could have time to
con-

contrive some method of replenishing their store. Leonard had also got victuals for his surviving mule. They had now an opportunity to take a more particular account of their situation; and Alfred smilingly asked his sister, if she had any objection to explore with him the apartments by day-light: she cheerfully consented; but Agnes was terrified at the idea of attending them, and equally afraid of remaining in the hall by herself, but at last resolved on the former.

The hall was of ancient architecture, but extremely noble, though heavy in the design. It was supported by large Gothic columns; the capitals were chiefly decayed, the shafts were composed of stained marble; and though of a considerable height, the diameters were greater than the strict rules of that kind of architecture would admit.

The

The top opened in a large dome and gallery, the walls of which had exhibited beautiful paintings, that were now nearly destroyed; a large painted sky-light terminated the height; and additional light was received from four elevated casements on different sides of the hall. Pilasters of the same dimensions upwards stood opposite the pillars, between each of which were niches that held statues larger than life; these were in some preservation, as the count had them placed there when he first came to the estate.

Two large fire-places stood at each end, which seemed to show that hospitality and the comforts of life had once been enjoyed in this dreary and melancholy abode. The pavement was of black and white marble, the stones of which were of a considerable size. In the front stood a large pair of heavy folding

folding doors that led to the apartments on the east and west wings of the abbey. Two stone stair-cases appeared on each side, which wound to the chambers above. Alfred resolved first to examine the lower apartments, and accordingly opened the folding doors, which discovered a small passage supported by Tuscan pillars; at the further part of it was a descent of several steps, which were in many parts broken and decayed; at the bottom of them was a pair of large iron gates, through which they perceived the remains of an extensive and noble chapel; this part they supposed had stood nearly in the same state from the first foundation of the building, as then intended for a place of religious worship. They re-ascended the steps, and discovered in the passage two large openings, which seemed to lead to the different

suites of apartments. They first entered those of the west wing. The furniture in the first room had been extremely elegant, though antique; it was in tolerable preservation, considering the number of years it had remained there without care; many noble paintings were yet hanging, but so decayed by damp, that it was impossible to make out the subjects. The second room was rather larger than the first, but in far worse condition; the tapestry was entirely destroyed, and both the casements and shutters broke nearly to pieces; the columns which supported it, seemed also rotten and decayed.

From this apartment they walked through many others that were in the same condition, and showed no signs of having contained any mortal within them for many years. In the last room
there

there was a strong door, which they perceived, by a window, opened into a court or terrace.

Having returned to the hall, they entered the apartments of the east wing. They were smaller though more in number than those they had left; and by the plainness of the internal part, they supposed them to have been offices for servants. At the extent of them was a door of the same size with that they had observed on the other side, and which opened also to the other end of the terrace.

“The situation of this place,” said Alfred, “shows that the inhabitants left it on a sudden; but yet it is amazing that so noble a building, and such elegant furniture, should have been left to perish by the ravages of time and neglect.”

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“ I cannot say I am altogether so astonished at that,” answered Matilda: “ for after such circumstances happening in it, for heaven’s sake who would willingly choose it for a habitation?”— Her brother smiled; and having again returned to the hall, they ascended one of the stair-cases, but soon perceived that both terminated in one landing. The abbey here was not divided; the chambers were consequently far more intricate: the apartments were spacious, and had been nobly furnished; the beds were heavy and antique, but all nearly destroyed.—They, however, after some trouble, contrived to change one thing with another, till they made up three tolerable beds. Two of them were in a large chamber, and the other closely adjoining. They deferred, however, finishing their search till the next day, on account of airing what they were to lay on at night. Leonard accordingly

cordingly made a good fire in the hall, and the clothes were placed before it immediately. — After another repast, Matilda begged Agnes to relate to them those occurrences that caused her to be exposed to the fury of so terrible a storm. — “ Alas ! Mademoiselle,” returned Agnes, “ I should even before this have related to you my little history, had I not been afraid you would have condemned my conduct ; but at least,” continued the poor girl, with tears in her eyes, “ you shall never have reason to reproach me with ingratitude for the favours I have received from you.”

Both Alfred and Matilda desired her, if the relation would bring fresh grief to her memory, to decline it, as in that case they would willingly suspend their curiosity.

Agnes declared, that, though it might

raise in her mind many sorrows, yet it would in the end give her pleasure to make them acquainted with her little narrative.—The party having seated themselves by the fire, listened with attention to their artless orator.

CHAPTER XXIV.

————— “ Yet I think
My tale will move each gentle heart to pity.”

HOME.

AGNES'S TALE.

“ MY grandfather and his wife were natives of France, and resided near Moulins.—His cottage was situated in the deep descent of a beautiful valley, and his name was La Faril.”

Alfred here looked at his sister;—they both recollected the name in their aunt's manuscript, where he was spoken of in the highest terms, as one who preserved them, at the hazard of his own life, in a cave near his house, from the officers of justice.—They did not, however, interrupt the fair speaker.

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“ They

“ They supported themselves comfortably by their industry and economy, and were respected not only by the inhabitants of their little vale, but by all who knew them, even at a distance from it.

“ They had a son and daughter; the former was the eldest, but it was to the latter they looked up for comfort and consolation in their old age.—Leolin had manifested from his birth a proud and haughty disposition, which made him rebel against all control, and be ashamed to own his parents, on account of their inferior condition in life. Both tried in vain, by inculcating honest and industrious ideas, to erase from his bosom those dangerous and infamous principles which seemed natural to him.—All was however useless:—he refused to be a peasant, and determined

mined to go to Paris, and seek his fortune in that city.

“ He there entered into the service of a dissipated nobleman, as valet de chambre. In this situation he was introduced to scenes of luxury, villany, and dishonour; while every trait in his character, which had, when a child, only appeared at intervals, (though enough to alarm his parents) now blazed forth with redoubled vigour, and destroyed those few good qualities he had shown in his youth:—in short, he was both a gamester and a swindler. His father received but one letter from him during three years; but reports of his misconduct were continually in circulation through that part of the country, although so extremely retired. The health of both his parents was much injured by these accounts; and their only comfort was the little Sabina.—

About four years after Leolin had left his home, he returned to it, for the first time, one night, at an unusual hour, but greatly altered, not with the healthful bloom of youth upon his cheek, but feeble, emaciated, and an old man in constitution, though only twenty-one years of age.

“ His father and mother were greatly shocked at the sight of him, but far more so when he demanded to be concealed in a cave that was at the bottom of the garden; they, however, lost no time in complying with his desire; as he said he expected to be followed by the officers of justice in less than two hours, on account of a robbery he had committed:—nor was his conjecture wrong; for early in the morning the cottage was surrounded by several men: but their search proved ineffectual; for the cave was so closely concealed

cealed as to prevent any discovery.— He remained at home some little time, but shortly returned to those vices which had already taken too fast hold on his inclinations, to suffer him to relinquish them, while he had health or strength to follow their pursuits.

“ The next news they heard of him was about six months after, when his father was conducted to Provence, where Leolin lay at the point of death, encompassed with misery, wretchedness, and want;—eaten up with disease, his soul torn with remorse for past crimes, and sinking into eternity with a conscience racked by the contending passions of horror and dismay. He, however, survived long enough to receive a parent’s blessing, who would, even then, have sacrificed his own life to have saved that of a profligate and undutiful son.

“ After seeing Leolin decently interred, the good old man returned to his cottage, overwhelmed with grief, yet with some hope of enjoying a few years of tranquillity, which might make him a recompense for past misfortunes. But how vain is the foresight of mortals ! in a very little time he lost the beloved partner of his heart, who had struggled with him through the early part of life, and been equally a partaker in his adversity and pleasures.

“ His health and spirits suffered now a greater shock than ever, and every week visibly altered him for the worse. His daughter Sabina had for some months received offers of marriage from Cyril, the son of a neighbouring cottager ; and the ceremony was shortly to have taken place, had not the sudden death of her mother put it aside. But after some time they were joined
together

together in the holy bands of wedlock ; and La Faril still remained with his child, whose attendance and affection he now needed more than ever.

“ I was born about twelve months after their marriage, and was greatly beloved by my parents and grandfather. I had just attained my thirteenth year when my father’s father died, and though every person had supposed him to be a man possessed of some little property, yet even his son was astonished to find himself heir to a considerable fortune. After the funeral, we were surprised to find my father intended to leave his native valley and cottage, to enjoy the luxuries of Paris. The news was like a thunder-bolt to my mother, who knew it would break her parent’s heart to leave that place, where he had been born, brought up, and continued so many years ; and she was certain it would

would equally distress him to be robbed of her company and attendance. In vain she advised her husband to give up all ideas of abandoning their cottage for dissipation and vice; but to purchase some land in that part, which would then be doubly dear to them.

“ My father was deaf to all entreaties, and declared his intentions of setting off in a short time. Our only hope was now that the solicitations of the good La Faril would have more effect on him:—but alas! he was too weak, and too much shocked, to make any exertion in the affair; and his prayers failed like those of his daughter. The poor old man was consequently obliged to be removed to the house of a neighbour, while his beloved child was forced from him by a cruel husband, whose ambition was kindled by the possession of a little wealth.

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The cottage and goods being disposed of, with many tears on the part of my mother and me, we took leave of my grandfather and our native vale. At the expiration of a day we found ourselves in the gay city of Paris:—and being settled in handsome lodgings, the first news we received was the death of La Faril, who survived but a very short time after his daughter's departure. It will be needless to enlarge on the grief that both my mother and I felt on the occasion;—we even thought we could trace some signs of remorse and sorrow in the breast of my father.

“ We were shortly introduced to those gaieties and vices which are supposed to constitute genteel life. Having been settled about six months in our apartments, my mother candidly asked my father what trade or profession he intended to follow, or in what manner he
designed

designed to turn his fortune to the best advantage:—but he told us to enjoy our present blessings, without troubling ourselves with painful ideas of what might happen on the morrow. These pernicious principles were certainly, in one respect, the ruin of us;—for he heeded not the advice of his wife or real friends, but plunged into every extravagance that seemed to gratify his wishes.

“ He, however, took some little care of my education, and I was instructed in every branch of useful learning.

“ Matters continued in this situation for three years; during which time my father purchased a handsome villa, and our house was constantly crowded with company. His wife most earnestly entreated him to contract his expenses: but her prayers were useless, and he
still

still answered in the same careless manner, ' Let to-morrow take care for itself.' We, nevertheless, saw him at times distressed and unhappy, and he would return home in an evening, from spending the day abroad, nearly in a state of distraction. My mother had sometimes hinted to me, the cause of this strange behaviour was gambling; and we were thoroughly convinced of it, when a man, one night, brought a note directed to him, and desired an answer to it immediately. Having opened it, we found it contained an appointment to a gaming house that evening.

“ I need not describe to you the fresh anxiety this information gave us, nor the rage of my father at the discovery of it :—but we could now plainly tell when he was a favourite of Fortune, and when not, by the different
turns

turns of his temper. Among the most intimate of his friends was a Monsieur Le Selet. This man was a well-known gambler, and withal a dangerous character in point of gallantry (as he styled it) among the ladies. He was a constant visitor; and we seldom sat down to table, but he was one of the party. Monsieur Le Selet, more than once, offended both my mother and myself by his behaviour to us in private; and we complained of it to my father; but he only rallied us on our prudery, as he called it; and declared him to be a man who had his interest at heart.

“ These gloomy fits which had only appeared at intervals, now returned more and more frequently, insomuch that we really thought his brain was affected, and entreated him to have some advice. But he would then fly into a violent passion:—nor was it till
three

three months after, that he confessed the cause of it was the entire loss of his fortune; and not only that, but he was a debtor to Monsieur to a very considerable amount.

“ At the time of this confession, Le Selet entered the room, and requested to speak with my father in private:— we accordingly retired to an apartment some distance from that we left. In about two hours, while we were wondering at their long conference, we were very much alarmed by hearing the bell in that room ring violently. Soon after, we heard the servants in a kind of confusion, and were just going to leave the chamber in order to inquire the reason for such proceedings, when we were met by the house-keeper. ‘ My master! my master!’ was all she could say. In vain we
asked

asked her to explain her meaning; she could utter no other words.

“ We were therefore obliged to run to the parlour we had before left,—when, judge our feelings at seeing my father and Monsieur Le Selet both weltering in their blood. We ran to the former:—he had just recovered from a fainting fit, and languidly looked up. We knelt by him and wept; he seemed affected; and those eyes which were half closed by death, shed tears of sorrow and repentance when it was too late.

‘ My wife! my child;’ he cried, in a voice scarcely articulate, ‘ I have injured you much:—I have taken you from the peaceful habitation of innocence, to be surrounded by vice and villany, to experience poverty, distress,
and

and oppression. Oh! my God!' he exclaimed with fervency, 'look down upon them; shield them with thy mercy from the iron rod of tyranny and injustice; nor condemn them for the wickedness of him who now implores thy aid.'

“ His voice failed him; he fell into convulsions, and expired. Greatly as we had to complain of his conduct, yet our grief was excessive. A surgeon had been sent for, but all medical aid was useless. The wound he received, as we afterwards understood, was by his own hand:—a servant had, from the hall, overheard the conversation. Monsieur Le Selet had called upon him that day for the payment of the sum he owed. My father begged the interval of a week to discharge it; this the former absolutely refused, but told him the whole might on one condition be forgiven.

given. He asked with eagerness by what method he should cancel the obligation; when Le Selet gave him a paper:—this paper the servant had snatched from the floor, and presented to us:—it was a bond by which my father was to resign his child to the arms of a villain, without any ceremony or articles of marriage. The horror he conceived at this proposal was too much for him to support, and he gave way at once to the passions of revenge and despair:—he seized a dagger, and plunged it into the breast of the infamous Le Selet,—then rang the bell violently, and afterwards, with the same hand, struck the bloody steel to his own heart. Monsieur Le Selet was removed to another chamber, but no hopes entertained of his recovery.

“ The wound, however, we were informed, seemed more favourable after
a few

a few days ; and we requested that he might be taken from the house as soon as a removal would not endanger his life. My father's affairs were greatly involved :—but we had the happiness to find, that, after the villa and goods with other effects were sold, there would not only be enough to pay his debts, but a small sum remaining. We now determined to return to our native valley, and accordingly took leave of Paris, and soon found ourselves before that cottage which we had once called our own, and where the remembrance of past felicity made our present misfortunes more poignant.

“ We were obliged to the charity of a neighbour for lodging, till we purchased a little hovel for our residence. I then opened a small school, and had the greater part of the children in the place.

place. By this employment we gained a comfortable living.

“ Among the neighbouring villagers was one of the name of Oliver. His character was without reproach, and he asked my hand in marriage.

“ Neither his friends nor my mother had any objection to the match, though the latter would frequently say, she thought my person might command a richer husband. On the evening before that day which was to have united us, as we were sitting before our cottage, sometimes joining in the rustic dance, we were suddenly stopped in our amusement by the arrival of a gentleman and his servant. The former advanced with a courteous air:—but judge of my astonishment and horror, when I perceived it to be Monsieur Le Selet,

Selet,

Selet. He seemed perfectly recovered, and requested to speak with my mother alone.

“ I trembled at the result of their discourse, which continued some time:—but all my conjectures and my misery were complete, when my mother informed me, that monsieur, having thoroughly repented of his former conduct and behaviour, now offered, as an atonement, to make me his wife. He sprang to embrace me; but I shrunk from his arms, and fainted away. On my recovery they were each standing by me, and intreated me to discard my present lover; while the artful Le Selet talked in so insinuating a manner, as to bring over my mother entirely to his favour; for she supposed it would secure a handsome independence for her child. But this conversation had no effect on me, and they each retired with

anger, and I with grief and distress. But I determined that night to leave them all. Whether you will blame my conduct, I know not, mademoiselle; but I was certain that monsieur was by no means the repentant person he seemed to be; and even if he had, I never could have liked him for a husband. I was also sure that my mother could get a living in the same employment as myself; for it had been agreed that she should take my school after I was married. With these ideas, I packed up a few clothes, with a little money, in a bundle, and left the cottage as soon as I thought my mother was asleep. I had not yet, however, resolved to what part I should go, but determined to apply to a carrier whom I had known for some time. He was to set out on a long journey early in the morning, and he lived about a mile distant. By the time I arrived there, he

he was just going to set off. The man's surprise was excessive to see me, who he supposed was to have been made a wife that day.

“ I explained to him the reasons for my visit, and threw myself on his protection; he readily granted it, and told me he was going to Italy. This information gave me great pleasure, as I thought I might there get employment, and conceal my real name and family.

“ We had not entered this country above two days, before Basil (the carrier's name) was taken ill; his disorder proved violent, and in less than a week he was no more. I was necessitated to sell his cart and the whole of his goods to pay the expences of his funeral and illness. I now found myself in a strange place without money or friends. The people, however, at the house where

Basil had died, informed me there was a family a few miles distant, who wanted a domestic. I accordingly applied:—but how great was my disappointment to find they were just provided with one! I found the whole of my little property would support me but three days longer, and began seriously to repent leaving my cottage, when I was overtaken by that violent storm, which proved one of the happiest incidents of my life, by introducing me to your friendship, care, and generosity; to which I most certainly owe my existence.”—Here the poor girl burst into a flood of tears, and concluded her story.

CHAPTER XXV.

SECRECY.

“ Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd ;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain ;
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the foul bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart ?”

SHAKESPEARE.

BOTH Alfred and Matilda thanked Agnes for the recital of her narrative : they pitied her misfortunes, and promised to protect her as long as it was in their power. Not only their own feelings at the time prompted them to this, but gratitude for the assistance their parents had received from her family. After some further conversation,

the bed furniture was carried to the rooms above; and having partook of a slight supper, they retired to their apartments. The chambers, however, seemed extremely cold, and Matilda begged Leonard would make up a little fire of faggots in each of them.

This was accordingly done; and Agnes having lighted a wax taper, which she placed on a large marble slab, they took leave of Alfred for the night, who, with his faithful servant, entered the room adjoining.

“ Before we go to rest,” said Matilda, “ I will take a more particular survey of this chamber.”

Agnes trembled; Matilda took the taper, and walked round it. The apartment was not so large as many, but had equally the same gloomy appearance.

ance.—The bed had formerly been noble and elegant, but was now partly decayed; the high and heavy cornice of it seemed rotted by time; the furniture, they could just perceive, had been of crimson velvet; but the curtains were now, in many parts, entirely threadbare. An old-fashioned cabinet and dressing-table, both of which had been ornamented with gilded figures, and stood in a Gothic recess, by the dim light, seemed, in form, to represent a tomb. Matilda, in vain, strove to open the former; it was locked, nor could she find any key. The wainscoting was hung round with large pictures; but, except one, they were all nearly destroyed, so as to make it impossible to discover the subjects. That which was in some preservation was the portrait of a man, in an Italian habit, at full length. He seemed of middle size and elegant figure; but the

countenance was melancholy and dejected, while he rested with one arm on the fragment of a grave-stone. Matilda gazed on it for a considerable time; it was extremely like the miniature of her father, which she wore in her bosom. She stood in such a situation that the eyes seemed to look full at her.

Painful and horrid ideas now arose in her mind; she almost fancied she saw the features move:—the thought overcame her: she shuddered, sunk in a chair, and burst into a flood of tears. Agnes had attentively observed her, and now joined her tears with those of Matilda: yet, with unaffected simplicity, strove to give her comfort and consolation. Her efforts at last succeeded, and, drying her tears, the former retired to a restless pillow.

It was a considerable time before
Matilda

Matilda could close her eyes; the misfortunes that encompassed her appeared now more terrible than ever. Agnes was in a serene sleep; all was silent and gloomy: her eyes wandered over the desolate chamber; and she could still see by the sudden light of the wood fire, which was dying away, but now and then blazed at intervals, the face of the picture, which still seemed to look at her. The ember was at last entirely extinguished, and the room was left in total darkness, except from the flame of the wax taper. At length, tired out with melancholy and terrific recollections, she fell into a disturbed slumber.

Horrid visions and ghastly figures now floated on her brain. Her father approached, covered with blood; and with an angry tone, called on her to revenge his murder. She started,

E 5 turned,

turned, and again composed herself to rest; but it was impossible. She now saw herself in an apartment of the abbey that was hung with black; in the middle of which lay a corpse in state: she walked up to the coffin: a voice whispered her, it was her grandfather. His countenance was black; and it struck her he was poisoned. At that moment count D'Ollifont appeared; he attempted to force her from the spot; but, at the apparition of her father, which then ascended, with an ashy paleness, and disfigured with wounds, he fled, and Matilda, in the struggle of horror and affliction, again awoke. In short, during the whole night, her mind was so entirely disordered by uneasy slumbers, that she arose in the morning with a considerable degree of fever, and by no means refreshed. It was remarkably fine, and she ventured to open the heavy casement of her chamber.

There

There was no danger of being observed; the high trees that surrounded the building, made it impossible that she could be perceived but by those in the inner part. The air refreshed her, but the languor of her spirits still continued.

The breakfast, which Agnes had prepared with the utmost neatness, was served in the first apartment next the hall. Leonard had got up very early, and cleaned it out; and the room now wore a far more comfortable appearance than it had done the day before. Alfred noticed the pale looks of his sister, and asked, with a smile, if she had been disturbed by any of the ghosts. She declared she had not been in the least alarmed; and each answering in the same manner, their fears of supernatural intrusion partly vanished.

They now consulted the best method

to procure provision, which must be done that day, with several other articles: at last it was agreed that Leonard should take a basket, and go out from the abbey, so as to be seen by no one in the way to it; and that he should mix with other persons in the public market, where he could purchase what he wanted, and perhaps gain some intelligence concerning their residence, and other circumstances relative to the count: but Alfred desired him by no means to force the conversation, as it might raise curiosity in the peasantry to know who and what he was. This matter being settled, Leonard was shortly equipped, and sallied forth with the utmost caution.

Alfred now proposed to his sister to examine those apartments they had not had time to look at the night before. Agnes said she now had courage enough
to

to stay in the great hall, which she had much rather do, and employ herself in preparing the dinner.

Alfred and Matilda accordingly ascended the stair-case, and walked through the suite of rooms they had before seen. They then crossed several others, larger and far more heavy.— These terminated in a passage, supported by small columns, and arched over in the gothic style. This place was extremely dark; they, however, with some difficulty, passed it, and entered, by a pair of folding doors, a more spacious apartment than they had yet seen, and, if possible, more gloomy. It had been entirely hung with black, and, from every appearance, had contained a corpse that had lain there in state at some former period. Several pieces of tapers were still standing in black glasses; and, in the middle, stood bear-
ers

ers for the purpose of supporting a coffin ; but there was now only the remains of a large plume of black feathers.

Matilda thought of her dream, and trembled. Alfred himself seemed at first struck with awe, but presently recovering himself, laughed at his sister, and strove to keep up his own spirits, by rallying Matilda on her fears. She entreated him to return ; the gloomy horror of this chamber overcame her, and she found herself extremely faint. He placed her on a kind of couch, that had also been covered with black velvet, and made several efforts to open the windows : this was, however, to no purpose ; but after some trouble, he pulled down a part of the broken shutters, and consequently received more light, which had before only entered from an opening at the top.

Matilda

Matilda in a few minutes recovered, but declared she would proceed no further.—Alfred persuaded her to ascend the stairs that wound round the west tower; but she positively refused.

He wished much to see the apartment, which, by his aunt's manuscript, he was informed, terminated, as was supposed, the search of his father. But his sister absolutely refusing to go any further, they returned to the hall. Agnes noticed the dejected looks of Matilda, but did not inquire the cause. Alfred resolved within himself to examine the west tower the following day, and satisfy his curiosity concerning the mystery of that extraordinary chamber.

Agnes was in far better spirits than she had been in since their meeting, and tried every way to comfort and entertain her dejected friends. Both felt the
the

the kindness of her intention, and acquainted her with most of the circumstances relative to their misfortunes: there were, however, some events they thought proper to conceal.

Lady Caroline Albourne was, however, still one of the chief objects of Alfred's thoughts. He loved her, yet was conscious he had not even merited her esteem.—By her manner just before he left England, he flattered himself he could perceive innocent traits of a confession of more than a common regard for him. But even though his conjectures should prove right, her prudence, her understanding, must have told her to tear from her heart a man, who, by the conduct he then pursued, must bring her to wretchedness, want, and misery. But there was yet even a greater misfortune to strike him with remorse. His name, his character, were tarnished
with

with dishonour. That name, which, he had been proud to say, had not shamed the family it belonged to, and that nicety of honour which it had been his utmost pride to preserve, were now, through folly and extravagance, ruined by the slanderous tongue of calumny, both in England and his own country. In the former it was most likely he would receive the appellation of an assassin and a swindler; in the latter, he would be branded as a base, mean, cowardly deserter from the service of his country; a disgrace to France, and the noble profession he had been brought up to—the defence of his country's rights.

“ Damned ideas !” he would exclaim in a voice of frantic rage.—His sister and Agnes were alarmed.—He begged their pardon :—it was the recollection of former distress that crossed his brain
at

at that moment. Matilda plainly perceived his impetuosity of temper broke out at every interval when the recollection of his folly, and the misery it had brought them to, intruded on his memory. She therefore studiously avoided to mention any topic in discourse that might lead to a remembrance of disagreeable circumstances.

Her griefs were consequently buried in her own bosom; yet they were not less poignant than those of her brother. She loved Mr. Milverne; but every hope of seeing him again appeared almost impossible. His letter, which they received at Dover, mentioned that he would join them as soon as possible in Italy; but then they had little thought of an occurrence happening, that obliged them to keep more concealed in this place, than their situation might have required them to have done, had they remained

remained in England. Nor was it likely Mr. Milverne should even have an idea that they were inhabitants of Grafville Abbey. The more she thought on those sufferings she had experienced since her mother's death, the more she was surpris'd how she had survided such a series of misfortunes ; but it fully convinced her that the Supreme Being constantly supports those who trust in him, though they may for a time be ordained to bear a load of adversity and sorrow.

Leonard returned in about two hours, laden with the purchases he had made. He acquainted them that he had been taken no particular notice of ;—but, mingling with other persons, had bought commodities, without receiving any disagreeable questions. This was pleasing intelligence, and they sat down to dinner with some degree of cheerfulness.

fulness. But yet there was something in Leonard's countenance, which showed he had been greatly chagrined, and that he had heard more than he chose to communicate. At the latter part of the day he requested to speak with his master alone.

Alfred immediately granted his request, and they ascended to their chamber.

Matilda was a silent spectator of this mysterious behaviour. Agnes was extremely alarmed; she was certain, she said, from Leonard's behaviour, that he must have received some very dreadful intelligence; and, in all probability, he thought it of too terrible a nature for them to be informed of.

Matilda smiled, and strove to dispel her fears, but was herself very much hurt.

hurt. Agnes's conjecture was by no means unlikely; yet she felt herself slighted at not being made a confidant in the affair. Their conference lasted near two hours. When they returned to the parlour, Leonard's countenance was still more gloomy, while Alfred strove to assume a gaiety foreign to his heart. Their supper was a silent meal; each seemed absorbed in melancholy reflections; and, after some little time, they retired to their apartments.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER sleepless night was passed by Matilda; and Agnes requested she would take her breakfast before she arose for the day. She therefore acquainted Alfred with his sister's indisposition. He was extremely concerned, and far more so to observe her dejected manner and pale countenance, when she joined them at dinner. Leonard seemed rather more chearful than he had been the night before; but his master still retained a gloomy sadness, that showed some cause of distress lay heavy at his heart. Both surveyed Matilda with a scrutinizing eye, and Alfred after some little time asked with a pretended air of indifference, if she had
rested

rested as free from disturbance as the night before.

It would not have been difficult for a common person to have perceived he paused with unusual anxiety for an answer, though he strove, as much as possible, to conceal that emotion which was visible to all.—She told him she had.—This reply seemed to give him considerable pleasure; and on her returning the question, he also answered in the affirmative. The alteration in his manner continued but a few moments, and he again relapsed into his former melancholy. He now mentioned his intention of examining the rooms in the west tower, and asked Leonard to accompany him in his researches. Matilda said languidly, that she also meant to be of the party;—at which declaration her brother looked very much chagrined.

“ I ra-

“ I rather think, Matilda,” said he, “ you had better decline it; the coldness and damp of those deserted chambers will not agree with your health and spirits; particularly now you are so much indisposed.”

She thought it might amuse her, and was certain the walk would be of service. Agnes attended; and they opened the large heavy door that showed the winding stone stair-case of the west tower. They found it very disagreeable to ascend, — the place having been so long forsaken, that large webs of dust and dirt almost impeded their passage. They at length, however, arrived at the first landing-place, where two apartments appeared, — the one to the right, the other to the left. They entered the former. It was a small square room, lighter than many they had seen in the abbey, but entirely clear from furni-

furniture; that on the left was of the same size, but contained several implements of war, among which were swords, shields, spears, and a few fire-arms,—a trumpet and drum, with other instruments of martial music: but all of them were in bad repair.

They again ascended the continuation of the stone stair-case, and found themselves on the second landing. The apartments on this floor were of the same dimensions as those below, but had been far better furnished. That on the right side was where their father had so mysteriously vanished. It was hung round with tapestry, which was now nearly decayed. The furniture was all Gothic, and greatly damaged; while the elevated narrow casements, placed at a considerable height from the floor, gave this room a most dreary and solitary appearance: in

short, it greatly resembled, and had, they supposed, in former times, been used as a place of confinement for some unfortunate prisoner. Leonard examined the boards; and they could plainly perceive those spots of blood which had before been observed by Edward and the physician. In all probability this blood was their father's!—the idea struck each of them. Agnes was greatly shocked and terrified; Leonard conversed with considerable emotion in private with his master for some minutes, while Matilda, unable to bear her own feelings, burst into a flood of tears. After an hysterical fit of weeping, she found herself much better; and, having closed the apartments, they descended to the parlour.

Some hours were again spent by Alfred and Leonard in a private conference above. Both still retained a settled melan-

melancholy on their features; while Agnes was more astonished, and Matilda more alarmed than ever. The reason of her brother's secrecy she could by no means discover:—hitherto she had been made acquainted with every circumstance concerning their situation; but Alfred was now silent even on general topics, and only put confidence in his servant. Her pride forbade her to ask questions, yet her curiosity prompted her to the humiliation, as being the only means of gratifying it. Evening approached:—their supper was again a silent meal, and they retired without any conversation having passed.

Agnes was soon in a profound sleep; but Matilda's thoughts on her brother's behaviour robbed her of repose. It was now the last hour of the night, and she strove again to compose herself to rest, when she thought she heard her bro-

ther's voice; yet she considered she must be deceived, as both Leonard and he had been in their apartments near two hours. The wind was extremely high; Matilda, however, still listened, and found she was not mistaken.—A listener was an appellation she detested; but yet she thought her present situation took every stigma from her character. She was, however, still irresolute in what manner to act, when a loud word from her brother made her determine to hear more. Having accordingly thrown over her a night-gown, she crept to the door. All was silent again for some time:—but after an interval of many minutes, she heard her brother check Leonard for talking so loud; “Matilda,” said he, “may not yet be asleep.” They then continued so low that she could not even understand one word. After another interval, Leonard answered to a question
which

which Alfred asked him, that "It was not the time."

"If I die in the attempt," said Alfred, "I will unravel this mystery:—and if I once—"

Here a violent gust of wind rattled through the chambers, and she was unable to distinguish their discourse, though they still continued talking. At length, however, she heard Leonard say, "I will be very careful, sir:—you may depend on my fidelity."

"For heaven's sake," continued Alfred, "follow it to the utmost:—but at all events do not discover—"

Here again the wind drowned their voices; and shortly after, she heard them retire for the night.

Matilda, chilled with horror and uncertainty, returned to her bed, and fell into a disturbed slumber. In the morning she appeared at breakfast, though her looks plainly told the state of her mind.

“Leonard,” said her brother, “is this morning going again to the public market.” Matilda was astonished; she knew they were in want of no provision.—Alfred “wished to procure some wine, an article he was certain they were all in need of.”

“But surely,” answered his sister, “Leonard purchased enough when he was last there.”

“True,” said he; “but we have had an accident, and broke nearly all the bottles which were full.”

Although

Although such an accident was not impossible, yet Matilda greatly doubted the truth of this assertion; and in her brother's manner she thought she could perceive an embarrassment, which showed it was merely an excuse to keep from her the real cause of Leonard's errand.—He, however, set off in a little time, equipped the same as when he before left the abbey, and using the same caution at leaving it.

After his departure they walked on the terrace which extended from the east to the west end of the building. Agnes was some distance from them, when Matilda considered that this would be a good opportunity to mention to her brother the great alteration she had noticed in him, since his long and secret conference with Leonard. Alfred at first seemed only to laugh at her fears, and wished to persuade her

she was mistaken; but she urged the matter so close that he at last confessed Leonard's information that night had given him considerable uneasiness and distress.

“ Then,” said Matilda, with quickness, “ let me share in that distress,— which will be far better than to remain in this horrid suspense.”

“ That is impossible,” returned Alfred: “ you cannot, must not, be acquainted with the affair.”

His vehemence alarmed her.

“ Is then the circumstance of so secret a nature, that I, who have hitherto been made a partner in the knowledge of all those misfortunes that have befallen us, must not now know that to which your servant is privy, and which

which may concern me equally with yourself?"

"Be not offended, Matilda, if I tell you again it is impossible that in this case I should gratify your wish: but be assured every method I take will be for your good and safety; nor must you be surpris'd at any remarkable behaviour in me at different intervals, or terrify yourself at any uncommon occurrences in this abbey, as our residence here is now more necessary than ever."

"Have you then seen any thing more than common?" said his sister with great emotion.

"With respect to this too, you must excuse me," answered Alfred: "at all events, however, we have one consolation, that those who trust in the Su-

preme Being need never fear the interruption of deceased persons."

Agnes at this moment overtook them, and he hurried from his sister with considerable precipitation into the hall. Matilda stood motionless some minutes.

"I am sure, madam," said Agnes, "signor Maserini has been saying something very dreadful; for I watched you all the time, and, though at a distance, could perceive your countenance change several times." Matilda wished to keep the last equivocal words of her brother from Agnes, as she knew she was, if possible, more timid than herself; but her looks contradicted her speech, and, little used to say untruths, even the questions of the innocent Agnes puzzled and perplexed her. They returned to Alfred in the hall. He was more
melan-

melancholy than ever, and Matilda was sorry she had spoken to him on the subject.

After some time Leonard returned, and produced plenty of wine, with part of a French newspaper, which he told them he had by chance laid hold of. One of the paragraphs mentioned the death of count D'Ollifont, and that, by the account of the physicians, he was murdered by a wound given him at a masquerade by his relation the chevalier Maserini, who had fled to France; but that strict search was now making after him both in that country and Italy.

“ At all events, then,” said Alfred, “ we must remain here, till either justice brings my cause to a proper crisis, or till I am crushed by arbitrary power and matchless villany.”

He seemed much affected, yet bore the news with unusual fortitude. Leonard requested to speak to him alone, and they retired to their apartment. Agnes again wondered at these private conferences, and Matilda was yet silent.

In about an hour and a half they returned to the parlour. Leonard still continued gloomy:—but there was a considerable alteration in his master—he was now as full of spirits, as he had been before melancholy; but yet they seemed forced, and it appeared more like a madman's mirth, than the regular sensations of joy. He laughed, talked immoderately, but yet often sighed.

Matilda observed him with anxiety and terror, while Agnes and Leonard were silent spectators of his strange behaviour. Supper-time at length arrived; when the little group formed an expressive

pressive scene. Alfred at one end of the table, first in an excessive fit of merriment,—then looking round him with horror, hardly able to suppress the rising tear.—His sister was seated next him,—her colour entirely faded through distress, while her fine eyes were fixed on him with a look of misery that well showed the inward workings of her soul.—Agnes wept, and looked up to Matilda for consolation, who was now unable to give it.

The good old Leonard was seated at a little distance from them, surveying each with attention, and often wiping from his aged eye the watery drop of sympathetic tenderness. “Give us more light,” said Alfred, “we will make a jovial night of it; and set on another bottle of the last wine.”

Leonard obeyed; two more candles
were

were lighted, and the bottle placed before him.

“ You do not consider,” said Matilda, “ that it grows late, and we have already had the usual quantity.”

“ I care not,” he answered : “ the Tuscan grape revives me.”

His sister perceived it had already taken great effect on his spirits. The night now began to grow extremely stormy, and the thunder rolled over the building with considerable noise. The room being very large, the further part from where they sat was entirely dark ; but even this space was at intervals illuminated by the flashes of lightning which darted through the windows in that part, the shutters being entirely decayed. Matilda and Agnes once more begged him to retire to rest ; but he

was obstinate, — declared he would not,—and ordered another bottle, having drunk the chief part of the former one. In short, he took bumper after bumper for some time, while every moment he became more frantic, and the avidity with which he drank confirmed him to be distracted. His behaviour also showed him to be intoxicated; and the walls of Grasville Abbey, which had so long remained in silence, now rung again with his exclamations and noise.—Yet his voice was often drowned by the repeated claps of thunder, while the lightning became more and more dreadful. Matilda, Agnes, and Leonard, were all silent spectators of this scene. It was now midnight, and they gave up all idea of persuading him to retire to rest.

“ Fill your glasses !” he cried : “ I am going to give you a noble health.”— He rose from his seat, and sighed heavily :

vily :—then holding up the sparkling goblet, he exclaimed, “ Lady Caroline Albourne !”

A most tremendous clap of thunder !

Each looked with horror : Alfred stood in the same posture as when he uttered the health ; nor had he been able even to put his lips to the glass ; but, after the noise entirely died away, seemed to be listening with a degree of terror, as if he then heard it.—In a few minutes he recovered himself.

“ This is a dreadful night,” said he to his sister.

“ It is indeed,” answered Matilda. “ For heaven’s sake, Alfred, let us retire to rest : I assure you I can hardly support myself.”

“ Another health !” he cried, relapsing
ing

ing into his former manner;—"another I must drink:—Leonard, replenish the goblet."

"You forget, sir, that it is now full."

"True, true," he cried, "I had forgot.—Here then," said he, laughing, "is to the old ghost that inhabits this abbey."

A violent crash!

All started from their seats.—Agnes shrieked, — Matilda looked wild, — Leonard ran to their assistance; while Alfred was still unable to put the goblet to his mouth, but stood half stupefied with wine, horror, and astonishment. The noise seemed to come from an apartment which opened by a pair of folding doors into the dark part of the room where they were now standing.

Before

Before any one could speak, a violent clap of thunder followed, and several flashes of lightning.. The first person who broke silence, was Leonard. "Be not frightened," said he to Matilda and Agnes: but his tongue faltered, and showed he was equally terrified with themselves.

"This is a terrible night," continued Leonard; "but I will protect you to the last drop of my blood."

"And so will I," cried Alfred, staggering from his seat: "I will protect you too."

"Talk not of protecting us, Alfred," answered Matilda: "for if the spirit of our father at this time walks in these apartments, it is but to reproach you for your present disgraceful situation.—Come, Agnes! we will go to bed."

"Oh

“ Oh ! no indeed, mademoiselle ! I dare not,” said Agnes : “ I cannot move.”

Matilda’s reproach seemed to have some effect on her brother. “ My father !” he exclaimed,

A deep groan !

“ Hark ! hark ! he answers me : it is from that room : I’ll see him, if I die.”

“ Not for worlds,” said Leonard, holding him. “ There may be treachery in this business, fir : pray stay where you are.”

Another groan !

“ Hark again !” he exclaimed, “ I will go ; by heavens, I will be satisfied.” At that moment he disengaged himself

himself from Leonard, who catching up a sword, followed him. They both rushed to the dark part of the room. Alfred was first:—he pushed open the folding doors. An amazing flash of lightning illumined the apartment they entered. Alfred, in a tone of horror, exclaimed, “There!”

The object caught Leonard’s eye. “In the name of the Holy Virgin,” said the old man, “who art thou?”

“’Tis gone, ’tis vanished,” answered Alfred. He was right: there was nothing now to be seen. They returned to the parlour; Matilda and Agnes, who had been entirely forgotten by them, were lying on the couch, nearly senseless; but the former had heard the words that passed, distinctly. Alfred had in a great degree regained his reason. Matilda and Agnes after some
little

little time recovered, and, with assistance, arrived at their chamber: here they parted for the night; and thus ended an adventure which seemed in a great measure to confirm all the terrific reports concerning Grafville Abbey.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HERMIT.

“ Beneath a mountain’s brow, the most remote
And inaccessible by shepherds trod,
In a deep cave, dug by no mortal hand,
A hermit liv’d,—a melancholy man,
Who was the wonder of our wandering swains.
Austere and lonely, cruel to himself,
Did they report him ; the cold earth his bed ;
Water his drink : his food the shepherds’ alms.
I went to see him, and my heart was touch’d
With reverence and with pity. Mild he spake,
And, entering on discourse, such stories told,
As made me oft revisit his sad cell.”

HOME.

WHILE in the midst of business or employment, we often suppose, on account of many disagreeable circumstances that are apt to impede our passage through life, that we could with pleasure

pleasure relinquish all commerce with mankind, and live after the manner of a misanthrope, totally secluded from our fellow-creatures.—However these ideas may intrude at certain intervals, yet it is improbable they should continue: when once brought to the trial, we should, like the inhabitants of Grasville Abbey, languish after society, though our situation might totally preclude such a wish from being gratified.

The agitation of Matilda's spirits, and her loss of rest the few preceding nights, combined to throw her into a profound slumber; and though she was still harassed with uncomfortable and terrific dreams, yet she enjoyed some repose; but the little benefit she received from it was entirely destroyed when she awoke in the morning, by a recollection of the late strange and uncommon circumstances. Her brother's
behaviour

behaviour was as incomprehensible as the violent crash and dismal groans which had been heard in the apartment adjoining the parlour. There was also another mystery to be explained, that is, what the appearance was which had drawn from Alfred and his servant those exclamations of horror that she had heard. This was a point of curiosity, with respect to which she in particular wished to be satisfied; but at all events she resolved to request no further communication from her brother. Leonard, therefore, was the only person she could question on the subject; and to him she determined to apply at a proper opportunity.

At a very late hour they assembled to breakfast. Alfred seemed buried in melancholy reflections, but made an apology for his late frantic behaviour.

Matilda

Matilda looked extremely ill:—Agnes seemed by no means recovered from her terror; while Leonard's countenance was still sorrowful and gloomy. Matilda understood, at the latter part of the morning, that Leonard was again going to the public market; but it caused no surprise, as they were in want of provision. He accordingly, in a little time, set off for the purpose of procuring some.

Alfred, after his departure, retired to his chamber, and took pen, ink, and paper with him. Agnes cooked the dinner, and Matilda took up a book. The former now began to converse on the events of the night before. "It does not signify, mademoiselle," continued Agnes, in an harangue of some length; "but there is something very unaccountable in this abbey.—I am sure I shall now be afraid even to remain

in this parlour by myself. The Holy Virgin protect us!—but I should not wonder if we were all to be carried away one of these days by the hobgoblins that haunt the place.”

“ Rather one of these nights,” answered Matilda, willing to put off the discourse with a jest.

“ Indeed, mademoiselle, but father Dunstan used to say such things have been seen, even when the sun shined.”

Matilda could not help laughing; but Agnes looked more serious, and declared father Dunstan was a man who had often conversed with them, and knew their tricks as well as they did themselves.

“ For heaven’s sake, Agnes,” replied Matilda, “ do not encourage these silly ideas, or you will make your life a scene

scene of uncomfortable apprehension and terror."

"It is a misfortune, mademoiselle; and you must pity instead of blaming me. Yet," continued Agnes, with an arch look, "I rather think you only talk in this indifferent manner to me, with the kind intent of dispelling my fears: I thank you; but you must give me leave to say, I think your thoughts are far different from your words."

This remark was just, and Matilda's hesitating manner and blush confirmed Agnes that she was right. After some time Alfred returned from his chamber. He spoke but little, and seemed to wait with a degree of impatience for Leonard's return. He, however, stopped longer than usual; and they had nearly finished their dinner when he entered. He brought with him a good stock of provisions; but the

information he received was by no means agreeable. The people, he said, talked much of the death of count D'Ollifont, and the large reward that was offered for the chevalier Maserini, his relation; "and though the general voice is much in favour of you, sir," continued Leonard, "yet we must not trust to that, and forget the temptation the money will excite; — an observation which they all agreed was very just. In a short time he requested a private conference with his master; and they returned to the parlour in about an hour.

Alfred was then more composed than he had been for some time, and Leonard rather more cheerful. After supper the latter informed them that he had heard, among other things concerning the abbey, that an old hermit resided in a cave near it, which had been his habitation for a number of years.

"I won-

“ I wonder,” said Alfred, “ if it would be possible to pay him a visit without being observed by any other person.”

“ Nothing more easy, sir,” answered Leonard. “ His cave is at the bottom of a long walk of cypresses, on the west side of this building. The situation is so retired, and withal so near the abbey, that it is never intruded on by any of the villagers.”

“ I should wish much to see him,” said Alfred: “ he may give me information of considerable importance.”

“ It is not at all unlikely, sir; for people say he knows more about the story of Grasville Abbey than any one in this part: though he is always silent on the subject.”

“ To-morrow, then, I will visit him,”

answered Alfred, "first as an indifferent person; but if I find him a man of piety, and inclined to prove my friend, I will make him acquainted with the whole state of my affairs."

"But I hope you will first," said Matilda, "be perfectly satisfied he deserves your confidence."

"That you may depend on; but I can see no objection to you and Agnes being of the party; and you will then, Matilda, be able to judge of my conduct."

Matilda was pleased with the proposal, and said she was certain the air would be of service to her. In short, this scheme seemed to meet with the approbation of all; and the evening was spent with more sociality than they had enjoyed since the second night of their residence in the abbey.

At

At an early hour they retired to rest; and as Agnes and Matilda left the parlour, each gave a fide look at the folding-doors at the further end, and trembled as they advanced to their chambers.

Matilda rested better than she had for some weeks, and rose with more than common spirits. She contrived to get down stairs before her brother, purposely to obtain an opportunity of speaking to Leonard alone. According to her wishes, he was in the parlour setting the breakfast table, while Agnes was preparing it in the hall.—She immediately opened the subject, and begged him to disclose to her those circumstances which had occasioned such mysterious behaviour.

Leonard looked chagrined. “Alas! mademoiselle,” he answered, “it is

impossible:—excuse me,—but I cannot satisfy you.”

Matilda was displeas'd.

“ It cuts me to the heart,” continued he, “ it does indeed, mademoiselle, to refuse your request: but I am bound by a sacred tie.”

“ I would not have you break it, then,” replied Matilda: “ yet, though you are much older than I, Leonard, I must caution you not to be too precipitate in entering into every scheme my brother proposes to you. He is rash; nor do I, from his behaviour the night before last, think his senses are in a right state at certain times.”

“ Heaven forbid they should be deranged,” answered this faithful servant: “ for then I am sure,——” here he stopped short, and was silent.

Matilda

Matilda considered it as cruel to attempt to draw from him that which he had solemnly promised to keep secret; and turned the discourse to the circumstance of his master's entering the apartment with him, from whence they heard the groans. She asked him to explain what he had seen to occasion those exclamations which she had heard uttered with great emotion. Leonard seemed greatly agitated and surpris'd: he had no idea how she could have heard those words, when both she and Agnes were to all appearance senseless at the time.

Matilda repeated the question. He was going to answer, but hesitated. She begged him not to keep her in suspense. He again began to speak, when Alfred entered the room.

Matilda was vexed and disappointed; — Leonard seemed happy at the intrusion,

sion, and Alfred looked surpris'd to see her up so early. He, however, cast a significant look at Leonard, which shew'd he could partly discover the purport of their conversation. Agnes brought in the breakfast, and the discourse became general. It was resolv'd they should walk to the hermit in the fore part of the morning,—that they should tell him they resid'd near, and that curiosity brought them to his retreat.

Being all equipped for the journey, they set off, walk'd round the west side of the abbey, and from thence proceeded through a quantity of thick foliage, to the grove of cypress, which, as they suppos'd, led to the cave. After some time they came to a spot entirely surrounded with trees; and here they observ'd an opening to a cavity which seem'd to be formed out of a mountain

that rose a considerable height above it. They stood some moments considering whether they should enter: but curiosity overcame their scruples, and they stepped softly forward. After having gone a few yards, they found the passage wound to the left, and could see at some distance a lamp which gave but a dim light, and seemed to hang down from the roof. Agnes and Matilda again stopped; but Alfred laughed at their fears, and they continued to walk in silence. As they came nearer, the passage widened, and they could just perceive a table covered with cloth, on which lay a human scull and bones, with a large book and hour-glass. Matilda trembled, and Agnes involuntarily turned round. Alfred, however, by a motion, begged them to be silent. They listened, and heard the voice of a person praying.

Their fears were now in some measure dispelled; and they walked a little further, when a reverend form caught their eye, in a long gown, which was fastened round him by a belt: he knelt, with his back to them, before a crucifix. Struck with a sacred awe, they stood in silent admiration, and listened to the hermit's prayer.

“Father of mercy,” he exclaimed, “hear the petition of thy servant!—cleanse him of those sins and wickednesses he has been guilty of in the sight of thee, and pour into his breast that balm of comfort and consolation thou only canst give. Strengthen him with thy grace; and, though immured in this recess, grant him power, O Lord! while on earth, to be of service to his fellow-creatures; that by good example and advice he may turn the hearts
of

of the 'unrighteous to a sense of thy goodness and mercy."

Here a flood of tears, which started from his aged eyes, prevented him from proceeding: he turned from the crucifix before him, and at that moment lifting up his head, beheld the intruders on his privacy. He gazed on Alfred, uttered a faint groan, and fell senseless on the ground. Alarmed at the emotion they had caused, each ran to his assistance, and strove to recover him from so alarming an insensibility. Their efforts, however, for some time proved ineffectual; but he at last showed some signs of returning life.

"Forgive us, father," said Alfred: "we come not with an intent to alarm you:—the fame of your pious character raised in us a desire to see so venerable a person. But be assured, if we
had

had known the effects our entering in so sudden a manner would have occasioned, our wishes should have remained ungratified."

The hermit still kept his eyes fixed with a wild look, and was silent.

"Indeed, father," said Matilda, "we regret that you have suffered so much on our account."

"Ah! and are you there?" exclaimed he: "I think I know you both."

Each turned aside:—a thought struck them that the hermit might have some knowledge of them; and they were in their turn greatly alarmed. Their fears, however, soon vanished, when in a more composed manner he asked who they were.

"We live not far distant," returned Alfred,

Alfred, "and as I before told you, were tempted by the reports of your piety and goodness, to pay you a visit."

"You are very young," answered the hermit, "to covet the company of so old a man. I have been extremely ill, and, at present, am but faint: pray all be seated. — Forgive me if I do not observe the laws of hospitality, as I am so little used to company, and am not quite recovered from my indisposition."

They refused his offer with thanks for his kindness, and promised to return at the same hour the next day.—"You will not, I suppose, father," said Alfred, "have any other visitors."

"None, my son," replied the hermit: "alas! I seldom see a soul in this retired spot. The dread of passing yonder

yonder abbey totally precludes me from strangers.—I am, however, glad that there are some whom report has not so far intimidated with idle fears.”

“ Adieu, father!” said they, as they came forth to the entrance.

“ Adieu, my children!” answered he :
“ the Holy Lady guide you !”

Here they parted.—Father Peter (for such was the hermit’s name) returned to his cell, and his visitors hurried to the abbey as soon as possible.

Their conversation at dinner was chiefly on their new acquaintance. None could account for the effect which their presence had on him, or the particular emotion he showed when by chance he turned his eyes towards Alfred. There was something mysterious

rious

rious in these circumstances, which made them rather dubious of performing their promise the next morning. They, however, at last resolved to risk it, and trust to the external appearance of this man in which were combined benevolence, humanity, and religion. Matilda also particularly noticed in his prayer the mention of the sins and wickednesses he had been guilty of. This again raised their suspicions; but Alfred observed, that to humble ourselves before the Supreme Deity, is a duty incumbent on every christian; "and," continued he, "such was, no doubt, the idea of father Peter."

Here the discourse dropped, and Alfred and Leonard, after dinner, had another private conference.

Matilda declared she found herself much better for the walk. This evening

ing was again spent with some degree of comfort, and they retired to their chambers rather at a late hour.—Agnes was soon undressed; but Matilda placed herself in the seat of one of the gothic windows, and viewed, with a mixture of pleasure and awe, the gloomy prospect before her. The clouds were low and heavy: yet it was moonlight; and the dark shadows of the surrounding trees, which terminated the prospect, spread over that space which remained uncovered in the court.

In an angle she could just observe the mouldering decayed side of the west tower, and the two where casements were to be perceived.—The wind was high and tempestuous, and seemed to threaten an approaching storm.

Matilda's spirits were uncommonly low;—she wept abundantly. “Alas!”
thought

thought she, "could I have known the sorrows, the sufferings I was to have experienced, gladly would I have welcomed death, and sunk into an early grave, without even a wish to survive.— But I was then happy,—cherished by a tender mother,—surrounded with friends,—beloved by all,—and knew not the duplicity of mankind, or the misfortunes human nature is subject to. Merciful Father," exclaimed she, with fervency, "forgive my murmuring at thy will:—strengthen me to support those scenes of adversity I am destined to go through; and give me fortitude enough to bear that fate it is ordained I should experience."

She found herself more composed, yet did not seem inclined to sleep, but continued watching the different changes of the sky. Her eyes wandered over the wild scene of foliage, which was in
a con-

a continual motion by the impulse of the wind. She thought it lightened twice, and was turning from the window, when her eye caught the casement in the west tower, and a strong glare of light at that moment darted from within it. Matilda could not move. She was motionless with surprise and horror, but still kept looking at the object, which continued illumined. In about three minutes a hand seemed to wave from one side. At that moment the light vanished, and all was again in perfect darkness. Matilda, scarcely able to support herself, staggered to the bed,—sunk on it,—closed her eyes through fear,—and, after a considerable time, fell into a slumber.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AGNES was astonished, when she awoke in the morning, to perceive Matilda was not undressed, and immediately inquired the cause: the latter, who had already determined on an answer, told her, that, having sat up longer than usual to finish a book, she fell asleep for the night. Agnes doubted not her veracity, and cheerfully went to prepare breakfast.

Matilda was perplexed to know in what manner to act, concerning the light in the west tower. The strange circumstances which seemed to encompass this abbey with a mist of doubtful horror, every day became more uncomfortable and disagreeable. It was true, the

the good sense and instructions of her mother had brought her up to despise superstition, and laugh at the folly of those who listened to uncommon reports. But the occurrences she had lately been witness to, gave her strong reasons to believe in supernatural existence. The crash and groans in the apartment, she had herself heard distinctly, and was certain both her brother and Leonard must have seen something more than common to have uttered such exclamations of surprise and horror. Her aunt's manuscript gave a particular account of a light being seen in the west tower, not only by her father and his servant, but by more than one of the villagers. An interval from that time had now passed, of near one-and-twenty years; yet she had again seen a light in the same building, which had most probably never been inhabited, even when the late count

Maserini

Maferini resided in the abbey. Such strange and mysterious events staggered all the fortitude she had derived from the lessons of her parent, and both alarmed and terrified her. She resolved, however, to keep the knowledge of the light to herself for the present, and watch again at the same hour, when she might possibly make some further discovery.

With these resolutions she descended to the parlour. Her brother was already up, and the breakfast waited for her. In about two hours, they were ready to walk to the hermit, and left the abbey accordingly. Father Peter received them at the entrance of his cell, and conducted them to the inner part, where he begged they would be seated. They discoursed on several subjects; Father Peter showed himself to be a man of great understanding and quick

quick imagination: these gifts of nature seemed also to have been cherished by an excellent education. His manners were elegant and polished, while his whole deportment commanded respect and admiration. There was, however, a settled gloom which overspread his countenance that shewed he had a heavy sorrow at heart, which he was unable to overcome. Alfred, at the latter part of their visit, mentioned the terror which people in general suffered concerning Grafville Abbey.

“ ’Tis a misfortune from birth, my son,” replied the hermit, “ which is greatly increased by the errors of education.”

“ Yet surely, such terrors are natural,” said Matilda: “ and in every situation, we should be subject to their influence.”

“ True!”

“ True!” answered Father Peter: “ yet they are greatly encouraged by tales of horror and terrific recitals, which curiosity prompts us to listen to, and which so far win on our fancy, as to make us anxious after such entertainment.”

“ Your observations, father, are just,” said Alfred: “ yet there may, sometimes, circumstances happen to us of a strange nature, that to all human probability would confirm the appearance of supernatural beings.”

Here he looked at Leonard, whose countenance changed, while he seemed to shudder at the ideas his master's words had occasioned. None, except Matilda, observed it: but she had lately watched every look of both her brother and Leonard. — Father Peter appeared also disturbed: he hesitated some

time before he answered; at length, however, he gave a short reply, and the conversation took another turn.

After a little time, they took their leave, and again walked to the abbey. Alfred, when dinner was finished, had a conference of some time with Leonard; and the latter immediately after walked out. Matilda, with surprise, asked where he was gone; Alfred answered her with some confusion, that he had sent him to try if he could, by any stratagem, find if there were letters directed to him at the post-house. This she knew to be entirely evasive: but she said no more; and her brother soon after retired to his chamber.

Agnes, the moment he was gone, began talking, as usual, of the room that was next to that they were now in, and declared she expected every instant
some

some hobgoblin would start through the large heavy folding doors before them. Matilda asked if she knew whether her brother or Leonard had examined the apartment.

“ Oh yes, mademoiselle, the other morning before you was up.”

“ And, pray, did they see any thing particular?”

“ Nothing then,” answered Agnes : “ but they did that dreadful night : for you must know I had the curiosity to listen to their discourse while they were searching the place ; and though they spoke very low, I could just make out, mademoiselle, they had seen a ghost.”

“ I am determined to have a view of this room,” said Matilda, walking to that end of the parlour.

“ Oh ! for heaven’s sake, mademoiselle, do not enter for the world !”

“ Ridiculous !” replied Matilda, and immediately pushed against the doors with all their strength, when they immediately flew open.

The apartment was spacious, and one of those they had examined at their first coming to the abbey. The furniture was in better order than most of the others ; but the shutters being closed, the only light came from an opening at the top. She walked entirely round, and could perceive no alteration whatever. Agnes stood at the door, and at intervals attempted to peep in, but directly shrunk back, and retired. Matilda, having satisfied herself, closed the doors, while Agnes impatiently inquired if she had seen any thing extraordinary. Matilda smiled
at

at the earnestness with which she asked the question, and told her she had nothing to fear. Agnes, however, was by no means divested of her terrors; and after the strange occurrences that had already happened, and those which followed, it is not to be wondered at that they greatly increased.

In about two hours, Alfred descended to the parlour, and shortly after Leonard returned: he brought some articles with him; but they were carried to the chambers above, and Matilda had no opportunity of knowing what they were. Supper-time arrived; when both Leonard and his master seemed, in some measure, to have regained their usual spirits: yet Alfred was impatient to retire to rest; at an early hour they therefore parted for the night. Matilda took up a book: Agnes, after being undressed,

H. 3 dressed,

dressed, wished her good repose, and was presently in a profound sleep.

Matilda now seated herself in the window, impatiently waiting the hour of midnight, yet dreading a repetition of the circumstance she had already seen. Her brother and Leonard, she could hear, continued in close discourse for some time; the purport of it, however, it was impossible for her to make out, as they spoke in a low tone of voice. At length the expected time arrived, and she kept watching with a palpitating heart the casement in the west tower.

The night was extremely gloomy; the moon at intervals gave a light; but heavy clouds continued frequently to eclipse it, and thunder rolled at a distance, while flashes of strong lightning

ning darted from an illumined part of the heavens, which seemed to form a mountain of fire. Matilda still kept her eye fixed on the tower; but no light appeared, except that from above, which fell on its grey decayed walls, o'ergrown with ivy, and slowly tumbling to the ground through the ravages of time.

She was just going to quit her situation, when she thought she perceived something move in the court below. A few minutes before, she had heard, as she supposed, her brother's chamber-door open softly, and a step cautiously descend the stair-case to the hall. At the time, she conceived it to be only fancy; but her ideas were now different. A strong flash of lightning gave her an opportunity to discover a figure walk slowly with a dark lantern across the court towards the outer gates. It was

closely wrapped up; but by the height it seemed like Leonard.

He now disappeared among some trees, but she still saw the light through the foliage. Matilda, more and more agitated, remained at the window. In about five minutes, the light again moved towards the abbey; and the moon at that moment suddenly appearing from a heavy cloud, she could plainly perceive two men follow the person who held the lantern. Both, by their dress, seemed Italians: but their cloaks were entirely fastened round them, and their hats flapped over their faces, so as to conceal the countenance.

Astonished at such an unexpected sight, and ready to sink with terror, she knew not in what manner to act. Leonard might be a villain! She checked herself at so uncharitable a supposition:

yet,

yet, why should he leave his bed at such an hour, and admit two strangers into the abbey, where her brother had, in all probability, preserved his life through the secrecy of his habitation.

This unaccountable adventure had so strange and dreadful an appearance, that she resolved to apprise him of the visitors, as she had every reason to believe he was asleep when Leonard left the chamber: at the moment, however, she was going to execute this resolution, she heard the latter enter, and softly accost Alfred in a low voice, saying, "They are come, sir;" and immediately they both descended, as she supposed, to the parlour.

The idea of the light in the west tower now vanished from her mind, and she was entirely taken up with the occurrence that had just past.

It was plain to her that Alfred had expected these men, as he could not be even undressed, by his directly leaving the room when Leonard came up with the information of their arrival; yet what business he could have with them, was an entire mystery: and the most tormenting suspicions, which she blushed to encourage, at different intervals, agitated her mind. She resolved, at all events, to watch their departure, which did not happen for nearly an hour and a half; when Leonard, with his lantern, again conducted them across the court. Soon after Alfred and himself entered their chamber, and as she supposed, retired to rest.—Matilda, harassed out and perplexed with the scene she had been witness to, undressed herself, and laid down on a sleepless pillow.

The conduct of her brother was so equivocal and secret, that she was
greatly

greatly at a loss to assign even one single reason for his late behaviour, since that period when Leonard returned from his first journey to the market, and desired to speak with him alone. The intelligence he received that day was certainly the cause of his strange manner of conduct since, let it be of what nature it would. Though she had laughed at Agnes's fears concerning the apartment next the parlour, yet something had been seen to cause alarm and terror: for the countenances both of Leonard and his master, which she even then took notice of, confirmed her they had been greatly shocked.

The light in the west tower had not appeared again as she expected; and she might have been rather doubtful of being deceived by the lightning, had she not seen an arm move within it at the same time. At length, wearied

with reflection, she strove to compose herself to rest, and fell into a disturbed slumber.

They assembled to breakfast at a very late hour the next day, and all (except Agnes) by no means refreshed by the little rest they had enjoyed. They deferred visiting the hermit till the afternoon. Matilda took particular notice of her brother, but could perceive no alteration in his manner from the day before.

Having walked to Father Peter's cave, he received them at the entrance with his usual cordiality, and set before them some fruits for refreshment.

“ I had them,” said the old man, “ from a peasant in the village, whom I often visit, and have known for many years, but never could persuade him to
come

come near my habitation: for being once frightened at passing Grafville Abbey, he has never dared to venture near it since; not even in the day-time!"

All laughed at the man's simplicity, as they called it, yet were all conscious they were a prey to similar fears.

"Indeed, father," said Alfred, "I have heard so much talk of this abbey, that I intend to enter it myself, and satisfy that curiosity which has been raised by the different stories I have heard concerning it."

The hermit's countenance changed at Alfred's words; and he in vain strove to conceal that agitation, which worked in his heart.

"By no means fulfil such a resolution, my son; the attempt may be dangerous.

ous. — I am an old man, and know more of that abbey than you do.—You must promise you will give up all idea of it.”

Alfred fixed his eyes on father Peter; —Leonard looked chagrined; Matilda listened with attention, and Agnes trembled with emotion.

“ Excuse me,” said Alfred, who was the first that broke silence: “ but you forget yourself, father, and in a great degree contradict the usual tenor of your discourse.”

The hermit raised his eyes, and was offended at the remark.

“ I did but warn you, signor,” answered he: “ but follow your own inclination; do not, however, accuse me of dissimulation.”

Alfred

Alfred felt the rebuke, and made an apology.

Soon after, they took their leave, and returned to the abbey.

Father Peter's behaviour appeared now more strange than ever; and Alfred determined not yet to trust him with the history of his affairs. They took an early supper, and retired soon after.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TERRIFIC SENSATIONS.

“Ayaunt! and quit my fight! Let the earth
hide thee!

Thy bones are marrowless; thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with!”

MACBETH.

IF, at the beginning of life, mankind in general were to be made acquainted with the misfortunes they must suffer in a series of years, the greater number would welcome death, and willingly escape miseries they would suppose themselves unable to support. But when the trials we are subject to, appear one by one, and we, in regular gradation, get

get the better of each of them, the last distress gives us fortitude to go through the succeeding one; and by that fortitude we struggle through the world, and thus arrive at a state of calm serenity, in the decline of existence.

Matilda had suffered too much for want of rest the two latter nights, to have any idea of again watching the west tower, or the unknown visitors to the abbey; she therefore immediately undressed, and was presently in a profound sleep.

The next morning she was much refreshed, and, entering the parlour, she once more, according to her wishes, found Leonard alone. She directly opened the subject of her former discourse, and now requested him to give that account which was so critically interrupted by her brother.

Leonard

Leonard seemed prepared, and answered with firmness, "that he hoped she would not be offended,—but he could not."

"Cannot, Leonard!" exclaimed Matilda.

"No, mademoiselle, indeed I cannot; my master suspected the question when we were last together, and gave me the most positive orders to be silent, with respect to every thing relative to that night."

Matilda, though possessed of the nicest sensibility, and finest feelings, yet had a warmth in her temper something similar to her brother; and though not quite so quick to imagine an affront, she was equally spirited in resenting an insult to her pride.—Leonard had hardly ever seen her so hurt; he looked distressed

treffed, yet appeared in every respect firm and resolved to keep his word. Matilda continued some moments in a haughty silence; but at length thus addressed him:

“ The cause of the flighting behaviour I have received since our residence here, I am at a loss to divine, Leonard; and heaven only knows how I have deserved it. Every question I have asked, though probably of no less importance to me than to my brother, has been answered with equivocation and reserve; while the strange behaviour of Alfred, and the melancholy continually fixed on your countenance, gives every reason for suspicion and apprehension.

! “ These circumstances, added to the several occurrences that I myself have lately been witness to in this desolate abbey, make it to me a most disgusting
and

and unpleasant abode. In short, though I have been taught to despise superstition, yet I have every reason to believe all is not right in the gloomy chambers of the west tower; while the words which I plainly heard you repeat on entering yonder room, confirm to me that you saw something of a dreadful nature: and," continued Matilda in a voice of displeasure, yet both firm and determined, "these reasons added together have made me resolve to quit this place immediately and for ever."

Had a thunderbolt at that moment fallen at Leonard's feet, he could not have started with more surprise and horror.

"Leave the abbey, mademoiselle! leave the abbey!—good heavens! you will not surely leave us?"

"Before

“ Before two more days are past, you may depend on it, Leonard ; during which time I shall be able to consider what method will be the most secret for my departure, on my brother’s account ; for, unless I am actually detained a prisoner here, I intend going to France, and becoming a nun in the convent of N*****, where my mother and aunt were both placed in the beginning of life.”

“ The Holy Lady protect us !” exclaimed Leonard. “ Do not encourage these ideas : they will drive my poor master distracted.”

“ You must impart the intelligence to him, and request he will contrive some method for my conveyance.”

Leonard was again going to reply : but Agnes brought in the breakfast,
and

and Alfred presently entered. Directly after breakfast was over, Leonard requested to speak with his master; and Matilda had no doubt concerning the subject of this conference.

When Agnes and Matilda were alone, the latter mentioned her resolution of leaving the abbey.

Agnes's surprise was not less than Leonard's, but of a very different kind; joy appeared in her countenance, and she declared, of all things in the world, it was what she most wished for—"I can then still attend you, mademoiselle, and yet leave this dreadful place."

"But will your wishes lead you to attend me to the place where I intend going?"

"Any where, mademoiselle!" exclaimed

claimed Agnes, her eyes beaming with love and gratitude—"even to the end of the world, with pleasure."

Matilda shed tears—She was greatly affected with the honest simplicity and good heart of this girl.

"But I am going to the convent of N*****, in France, Agnes, and intend positively to take the veil immediately."

Agnes turned pale.

"To the convent of N*****, mademoiselle! and take the veil! but I will follow you there too."

Here she burst into a flood of tears; for in that case all hopes of a union with Oliver, whom she still loved, must have ended.

Matilda

Matilda guessed her thoughts, and pitied her situation.—She knew not how to proceed:—the little money which they had brought over from England, and which, as was before related, was the last Alfred had to receive of his fortune, being now nearly half expended: and on this account it was that she generously determined (should it be possible to be done, without discovering her brother) to make over to him all that she was possessed of by her mother's death; as she would, after once becoming a member of the holy community, be no more in want of money to support her. At all events however, she resolved, if it was not agreeable for Agnes to retire with her to the convent, to make her a handsome present, and, if in her power, see her comfortably settled. This proposal she acquainted her with; but to part with Matilda, was

nearly as distressing to the poor girl as to lose Oliver for ever; yet she must consent to one or the other. In vain she strove to persuade Matilda, by every argument she could think of, to give up the idea of going to a convent, and live retired in France: and little did she suppose, while they were repelled with a steady fortitude, that Matilda had the same tie as herself to make a retreat from the world miserable; yet, with the most elevated and noble sentiments, she sacrificed her own happiness for the sake of a brother.

Agnes still wavered, sighed, and wept, but was unable to come to any resolution.

After some time Alfred and Leonard entered the parlour: both appeared distressed, and the latter requested to speak with his sister, alone. They re-

tired to a chamber above. He informed her, Leonard had been telling him of her intention to quit the abbey, and retire to the convent of N*****.

Matilda answered that the information was right, and that such was positively her determination.

He entreated her not to take so rash a step, but well to consider a monastic life, before she entered into it.

That, she said, she had already done; for the many adversities she had gone through since her mother's death, had sickened her of the world, and ——

“ Hold, Matilda!” exclaimed Alfred: “ is there not one person in this world which you are so disgusted with, whom you may think of with a sigh of tenderness, and that sigh bring a wish that
you

you never had been immured within the walls of a convent?"

Matilda felt herself hurt at the question.

"Let my ideas or remembrances be whatever they may, my resolution is fixed; nor can my situation be worse than that I am now involved in,"

"Do you accuse me of unkindness, Matilda?"

"In some respects I do.—But this discourse is ridiculous; let us consider in what manner I shall escape without injuring you."

"Surely you do not actually intend leaving us?"

"After what I have said, do you suppose I jest?"

“ You must not, cannot go,” he exclaimed, raising his voice.

“ And pray, sir,” answered Matilda, her pride piqued—“ by what right will you detain me ?”

He seemed chagrined.

“ Indeed, Matilda, you must think better of this affair.—Give up the idea, and consider it as romantic.”

“ Without I am detained by force,” answered Matilda with firmness, “ I am determined to leave this abbey before—”

“ Hold,” said Alfred, “ and inform me for what reason you have thus suddenly taken so strange a resolution.”

“ For various reasons, all of which combined together show that it is positively

tively necessary for my own happiness. Represent to yourself my situation,—confined within the walls of this awful, gloomy, and melancholy abode, the external part of which, added to the stories that have been circulated concerning it, terrify people even from the place where it stands; while the mysterious and strange circumstances that have happened since our residence in it; confirm in a great measure those reports;—yourself and Leonard involved in a deep melancholy, the cause of which you both refuse to impart, though by your behaviour you give encouragement to the most horrid and dismal suppositions.—The innocent Agnes continually terrifies herself and me by those fears which are certainly caused by the most powerful reasons, and which prey the more on my spirits, by my being obliged to support hers, and to talk lightly of those ideas I feel myself with equal

terror. But I will confess my intention was hastened by Leonard's refusal to give that information I required relative to your entrance into that room next the parlour on that dreadful night of the storm.—When first I requested the explanation, we were interrupted by you; and he now tells me, that, suspecting the purport of our discourse, you forbid him to answer the question. Neither would you give any satisfactory reply during our conversation on the terrace, but left me to think the worst in a state of uncertainty. In short, there is an arbitrary principle reigns through the whole tenor of your conduct, which I am resolved no longer to put up with."

Here her countenance glowed with anger and contempt:—she was going to leave the chamber, when Alfred stopped her.

"Hear

“ Hear me in some measure vindicate myself,” exclaimed he, “ though I cannot at present satisfy your curiosity.— In the first place, you complain of your residence in this abbey ; but consider for a moment, Matilda, and you will find that it was my exertion in the preservation of your honour, and the punishment I gave the villain who dared to insult you, that obliged me to fly hither, and ignobly conceal myself from pursuit, while double infamy was poured upon my name, and by hellish contrivance I was proved a deserter unknown to myself.— You well know, when at Dover, I had resolved to give up my person to my country, and stand my trial for the crime ; but Mr. Milverne’s letter altered this resolution, when he informed me that the count was not dead, but that arbitrary power would be certain to overcome justice in any case in which the wretch D’Ollifont

was concerned. Setting this argument aside, I confess you have had some cause for resentment for the concealment of what I know would be improper to communicate; and I beg you to remember, however difficult it may appear to account for my actions, I ever have your happiness in view.—Only make me one promise, that you will remain a fortnight longer; and then, if a part of my conduct is not explained, I swear I will adopt some method for your departure.”

“This I agree to,” answered Matilda, “and to show you that I have a just sense of the part you took with respect to the count, it is my intention, when once I arrive at the convent, to make over the whole of the little property I am possessed of, entirely to you.

“Alas! Matilda,” answered Alfred,
“that

“ that will be of little service ; for if some one does not appear, to make you alter your resolution before the stated time, I shall have far less occasion for it than yourself.”

He sighed heavily ;—Matilda looked astonished, and left the chamber.

“ Generous girl !” he exclaimed, “ could I but once see thee happy, and forget the object of my love,—life would have no charms to detain me ; and the world should immediately know that Alfred Maserini could laugh at its malice, and make tyranny blush at the exertion of its own power.

CHAPTER XXX.

AGNES and Leonard were soon made acquainted with the agreement that had passed between the brother and the sister; and it gave both of them pleasure that the time of Matilda's departure was deferred. Agnes thought she might possibly, in this interval, bring herself to follow so bright an example, and renounce the world for ever; and all were rather more cheerful than usual at dinner. Alfred afterwards proposed a walk to the hermit; but when they arrived at the cave, the place was deserted; and they therefore supposed father Peter was gone his round among the villagers. Having returned, Alfred read some poetry aloud, which amused them till near supper-time; and soon after a
light

light repast, they retired to their respective chambers.

Matilda determined to watch again for the strangers, and the light in the west tower, She accordingly took up a book, which occasioned the same excuse as before, to the innocent and unsuspecting Agnes, who was soon in a profound sleep. The night was serene and beautiful: not a breeze of wind disturbed the surrounding foliage: all was silent, tranquil, and solitary; while the heavens, covered with stars and illuminated by a full moon, gave the eye a more clear view of the dark groves of cypress, and the heavy ruins of the west tower.

Matilda watched with a palpitating heart the upper casement, till near midnight, when a strong glare of light, as

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before,

before, appeared: but in less than a minute all was again dark.

In a little time after, she heard Leonard creep softly out of the room, descend the stair-case, and cross the court. In about five minutes he returned, accompanied by two other persons, whose figures she now saw more plainly; and she judged them to be the same who paid the last visit. Alfred joined them in the parlour.—They did not remain in the abbey so long at the former time; but Leonard, as before, conducted them to the outer gates.

Just as they got into the middle of the court, the light in the west tower again appeared; and it was immediately noticed by one of the strangers, who seemed to utter an exclamation of surprise. Both his companion and Leonard immediately looked up; and all
seemed

seemed struck with the utmost astonishment. The casement had been illuminated about three minutes, when a figure advanced, and stood in the front of the window.—Matilda shuddered, and those below seemed greatly alarmed.

The form looked to be that of a man; but she could not possibly make out either its dress or countenance. It continued visible but a very short time, when it appeared to sink down by degrees, till it was entirely lost; and the light immediately vanished.

Leonard and the strangers clasped their hands in sign of wonder; the former attended them to the gates, and then returned to the abbey: but neither he nor Alfred re-entered their chamber, till near half an hour after.

Matilda, fatigued, and terrified with
what

what she had seen, retired to her bed, but not to sleep. Her mind wandered over such strange events; and the more she thought of them, the more she was perplexed. Mystery seemed to follow mystery, and every succeeding one appeared more horrid than the former.

The gloomy look of her chamber encouraged the most dismal ideas; and her eyes, as if by impulse, were continually fixed on the picture before mentioned, and which Matilda was so struck with, the first night she slept in the room. Directly opposite her bed, was placed a pier glass of uncommon size, and surrounded by a heavy gilt frame. This piece of furniture had lately been added to the chamber, it having before stood in one of the apartments below. A small lighted taper was near it, and the dim uncertain light which it gave, showed but faintly the reflection of the
objects.

objects in the glass. Matilda, unable to rest, and tired with the continual sight of the painting, turned her eyes towards the glass; it showed the bed and the recess on each side: but the back ground of the reflection was nearly dark.—She was perfectly awake, and sighed at those ideas she was unable to repress.

The sigh was answered.

She trembled,—thought it might be Agnes,—but was convinced she was mistaken.—She heard it again:—she thought it certainly could not be fancy.

It was repeated a third time.

At that moment she perceived a light through the glass, and the same figure she had before seen in the west tower, advance, bearing in the same manner a lamp.

Matilda saw no more : she screamed, and closed her eyes.—In about a minute she opened them again ; but the appearance had vanished. Agnes, however, awoke, and requested to know if she was ill ; while her brother knocked at her door, and asked the same question. She answered both that she was well, but had been dreaming : and it being a natural supposition that this might be the reason of her terror, no further enquiry was made. Matilda could not be composed : and the more she strove to persuade herself it was merely the effects of a disturbed brain, the more her own senses confirmed the contrary. By her sight of the figure in the glass, it seemed to come forward from the left hand side of her bed. There was no opening in the room for the admittance of any human being, except by the door of the chamber ; and that was bolted on the inside.

—She

— She was entirely free from sleep, nor had heard the least noise since she had first entered the apartment in the beginning of the night.

She determined to inform her brother of this circumstance, the first opportunity on the following morning, as it was of too horrid a nature to be passed over in silence.—She again strove to rest, but it was impossible; and fearful of even lifting her head above the bed-clothes, she suffered the most tormenting and terrific sensations.

Morning at length broke in upon the room, and the sun with glowing splendour darted through the thick foliage of the trees, till with majestic grandeur he rose above them, and seemed to change the face of nature to life and joy.—Matilda hailed the morning with a hymn to that Supreme Deity
who.

who caused the change, and at whose nod the same darkness and horror could in a moment be returned.—Agnes soon rose. She perceived Matilda was unwell, and begged she would not get up to breakfast: but the latter was certain this would be of no service to her, and she accordingly, after some little time, joined them in the parlour.—Alfred enquired if she was ill; she faintly answered, “No;” but her manner contradicted the reply.—After breakfast she requested to speak with him, alone.

Poor Agnes had every day more and more cause for wonder, and now declared to Leonard she was afraid Mademoiselle was going in the same way as he and his master.

Matilda and Alfred ascended to the chamber of the former, and she related to him the events of the last night.

Her

Her recital of them was so clear and perfect, and her manner of delivery so steady and free from every appearance of a flighty imagination, that, however improbable the tale might seem, Alfred was staggered at the answers she gave to the arguments by which he attempted to persuade her to think no more of it; and at last became a convert to her opinion: nor is it so much to be wondered at that he so readily acquiesced in a belief of the fact, since he himself had once been witness to a light in the west tower, and seen an object which made a great impression on him on entering the room next the parlour, and had heard Leonard, the night before the present morning, relate that he had (as also those that were with him) seen a light and figure in the same casement of the tower.

These circumstances, with some others
of

of a like nature, following each other in due order, were certainly in a great degree sufficient reasons for his belief of a fact which he otherwise would have laughed at and disregarded.

After a pause of silence for a considerable time, during which the countenances of both brother and sister were expressive of affliction, distress, and horror, — Alfred declared an intention, which both alarmed and terrified Matilda, but which he seemed obstinately bent on executing:—it was to watch himself for one night in the west tower.

“Leonard,” said he, “shall sleep in my room as usual: but by no means acquaint Agnes with this resolution.”

“For heaven’s sake, Alfred,” answered Matilda, “do not admit such a thought: I would sooner suffer any thing

thing than you should expose yourself to such a risk."

Alfred smiled.

"Why surely, Matilda," said he, "we have nothing to fear from supernatural beings."

She still, however, urged and entreated him to think no more of it. But he continued firm to his plan; and it was in vain his sister used every persuasive argument she could think of, to make him give up such a dreadful determination.

"Who knows," said he, "Matilda, but one night may unravel mysteries that have been concealed for years?—who knows but by the exertion of a little fortitude,—by banishing idle fears, and showing some degree of spirit,—we
may

may defy our enemies,—my conduct may be made clear to the world,—and a series of happy years be a reward for adversities at the beginning of life? —What would I not suffer,” exclaimed he, “for such blessings and happiness! O merciful father! if the injured spirit of my sire walks in this deserted abbey, and seeks the presence of his son, should I not strive for the interview, though it might chill my nature at the time?”

“Go!” pronounced a voice, followed by a dismal groan.

Matilda sunk into a chair.—Alfred held her arm, and trembled.

“In the name of our Holy Virgin,” said he, “answer me, who and what thou art.”

“Go, — go, — go!” repeated the voice,

voice, three times; and then with another groan it seemed to ascend and die away.

“ Surely,” said Alfred, “ heaven interferes in my behalf, and tells me to proceed! — Now, Matilda, you can urge no objection.”

She sighed deeply.

“ But you are ill: we had better go down to the parlour immediately.”

“ I am indeed,” she answered, hardly able to stand.

Her brother partly carried her down the stairs, and placed her on a sofa;— she directly fell into strong hysteric fits, which lasted a considerable time;— every method was taken for her recovery; and they were greatly alarmed.

At

At length, however, she seemed more composed, and, after some hours, found herself much better, though extremely weak.

Leonard, who had hitherto been made acquainted with every extraordinary circumstance, was now in his turn a wondering spectator; and Agnes, still more distressed and terrified, declared it would be the happiest moment of her life, when she once found herself at some distance from so dismal and horrid an abode. Alfred mused in melancholy silence on the strange voice he had heard; nor had he now a single doubt of a supernatural being haunting the chambers of the abbey. "Surely," thought he, "that room, where it is likely my father lost his life, is the most probable place to be visited by his disturbed spirit. Yet, may not my senses be so far overcome by seeing the departed

parted shade of a parent whom I never knew, but who was supposed to have been basely murdered, as to prevent my utterance at the critical moment of its appearance?"

Matilda was silent and melancholy; —she considered it would now be ridiculous to strive to prevent Alfred from watching in the west tower, since so strange an occurrence had strengthened that resolution which he had before taken: yet fears for his safety harassed her imagination, and almost threw her into a state of insanity.

Only one method she could think of, that would in any degree alleviate her anxiety; which was to propose his having Leonard to attend him the whole night: but then she shrunk with terror from the thought of sleeping at such a distance from any one but Agnes, and

feared she might again see the figure in her chamber. Her regard, however, for her brother, made her resolve to sacrifice her own feelings, and at least make the proposal to him.

After dinner they contrived to send Agnes into the hall for a few minutes; and Leonard was then made acquainted with the events of the morning, and with the determination his master had taken of watching himself that night in the tower.

Leonard turned pale.

“For heaven’s sake, sir,” said he, “do not attempt it!”

“But consider,” replied Alfred, “the words which the voice repeated.”

Leonard could make no answer, but turned away with horror and surprise.

“At

“ At all events,” said Alfred ; “ Agnes must not know of this affair, nor of my visit to the deserted chamber.—We must therefore contrive to make every thing ready without her knowledge, and in such a manner that I may first go into my own room, as if to retire to rest, and after some little time steal to the west tower.”

Matilda and Leonard shuddered at the idea of what might happen there: yet neither, after what had happened, could attempt—at least they knew it would be of no avail to attempt to persuade him to relinquish his intention.—Agnes now entered.—Alfred and Leonard immediately ascended to their chamber, and conveyed a table, with some books, wine, and provision, to the apartments before mentioned, where those spots of blood were to be seen,

K 2

which,

which, in all human probability, was that of Alfred's father.

Leonard also laid a wood fire, and made the room as comfortable as possible.

Having done this, they returned to the parlour, and Matilda soon found an opportunity to request he would let Leonard remain with him the whole night; but her brother positively refused it, though he at last agreed Leonard should accompany him to the tower, but then return directly. Alfred proposed a walk to the hermit; but Matilda appeared too ill to undertake it; — they therefore postponed it till the next day. Supper-time at length arrived, and anxiety was marked on the features of all:—Alfred was occupied by the thoughts of what he might be

be

be witness to in the short space of a few hours; and Matilda, alarmed for his welfare, and terrified at even entering her chamber,—dreading lest the midnight hour should again show her the phantom.—Leonard weighed in his mind the difference of their situation: when possessed of a tender parent, they knew no unhappiness, except for the misfortunes and sorrows of others, which they were ever ready to pity and assist.—Agnes was almost afraid to turn her head, for fear of seeing some hideous spectre.

All wished to delay retiring to rest, and they talked some time after supper on indifferent subjects, but with heavy hearts;—till at length Alfred arose.—They ascended the great stair-case, and parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MYSTERIOUS EVENTS.

————— Prythee, see there!

Behold! Look! Lo!—How say you?

Why, what care I? If thou can't nod, speak
to't;

If charnel-houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury, back,—our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites.

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN an opinion is once formed, every succeeding circumstance seems to confirm what our ideas have before suggested; and though of a far different nature, every object is referred to the same point of view.

Thus it was with Matilda;—she no longer doubted, and a dreadful certainty took place: she did not now hesitate
whether

whether such things might be, but she fervently believed such things were; and consequently every trivial event strengthened this imagination.

Agnes, as usual, was soon in bed; but Matilda resolved to watch the casement of the tower. "My brother," thought she, "will shortly be there; and it will be some little comfort to see the dim light that proceeds from his lamp."

A book was her excuse for not undressing,—and Agnes in about a quarter of an hour was asleep.

Alfred and Leonard remained in their chamber some time. It was near midnight when Matilda heard them leave it; her heart palpitated for their situation, and she shrank with horror from her own. Neither was now near:—the shadow of the preceding night pre-

sented itself to her fancy, and her blood was chilled at the very thought. Thunder rolled over the abbey, and pale flashes of lightning darted on the mouldering ruins.—Matilda could not yet discern a light; she conceived they must be a considerable time ascending,—while her fears and anxiety made her forget that they had first to go down the great stairs, and afterwards up those of the west tower.

At length a faint glimmering appeared, which was a kind of signal to her that they had entered the chamber.

The thunder became more awful, and awoke Agnes—

“ Good heavens, mademoiselle, are you up yet?—What a dreadful night!”

“ It is rather stormy,” replied Matilda, striving to be composed.

“ Rather

“ Rather stormy, mademoiselle ! why the thunder is horrid, and the lightning too is extremely bad : you had better move from the window :—it is very dangerous to stand so near it.”

Matilda took her advice. The lightning became much worse ; she sat down by the side of the bed, and requested Agnes to compose herself to rest.

“ But are you not going to give up reading for the night ?”

“ I have just finished the book,” answered Matilda, “ and then shall go to rest.”

There being now a little interval in the storm, Agnes was soon in a slumber.

By this time she expected Leonard would have returned to his chamber ; but she had not yet heard him enter it.

The light still continued in the casement: but the storm was so very violent as to prevent her being continually at the window.

Near a quarter of an hour elapsed, and she heard nothing of Leonard.—Seated on the bed, she dared not turn herself towards the glass, but kept her eyes fixed on the ground, terrified at the idea of even looking round the room.—At last a noise, which seemed to proceed from the court below, made her rise, and go to the window.—She could see no one, yet heard a kind of knocking at the outer gates.—Who or what it could be, she was at a loss to imagine; and, the noise increasing, she became more uneasy and astonished.—She was equally unable also to account for Leonard's stay, and conceived something very extraordinary must have happened.

The

The noise now ceased for some little time, but afterwards became more clamorous; and at last, by the sound, the gates seemed to burst open.—A thought struck Matilda, that they might be discovered, and that the officers of justice were come for her brother.—She trembled at the supposition, but still remained at the casement.

After a short period, she perceived four men armed approach the abbey:—two of them had lanterns, and the others followed directly after.—Matilda was nearly distracted; she knew not in what manner to act. Leonard might be returned, though she had not heard him.—She tapped at the door, but received no answer. — She knocked louder:—all was silent:—she entered the chamber, but it was entirely deserted. Having listened at the top of the stair-case, and heard them enter the

K 6

hall,

hall, from which they proceeded to the parlour, all fears of supernatural appearances vanished from her mind, and the preservation of Alfred employed every faculty. She determined to descend, and strive to make out, unperceived, the occasion of their visit.

But then, if Agnes should awake, and find no one near, what would be her situation?—Matilda hesitated a little, but at last resolved to run the hazard for the sake of her brother. She therefore took the lamp, and softly stepped down to the hall, which having crossed towards the door of the parlour, she stopped, and through the crevice could see that they were all seated round the supper table, which had been left standing in the same place, and on which was some wine:—this they were making free with, and seemed in high mirth.

Ready

Ready to sink with anxiety, she supported herself against a column; and the door not being quite closed, she had a view of each of their countenances, at different times, as they turned round to speak to each other.—By their dress and language she found they were Italians.

“ Push the bottle about !” cried one, who seemed to be a kind of superior, and whose visage was, if possible, fiercer than those of his comrades: “ nobody loves good wine better than I do, particularly when it is got cheap.”

Here was a loud laugh, and a boisterous chorus of a song used by banditti.—At last silence was in some measure restored; and one who sat on the right side of him that spoke, reminded him not to make too free with the bottle, and forget the business they came upon.

“ True!

“ True! true!” answered he: “ I thank you for your caution; for faith there is a great danger of it, as you say, when we are seated at such a table as this.—But now to business;—come, in the first place, we are to contrive in what manner to find him; for my own part I propose to ——”

Here a loud clap of thunder rolled over the abbey; and she was unable to distinguish what followed.

After some time she heard the voice of the third.

“ It is very true,” says he, “ that might do well; but I have reason to think he is in the west tower to-night, by the light I saw in the casement.”

“ Pish!” answered the first, “ that place is haunted; I have often seen a
light

light in it, when not a soul inhabited the abbey."

Matilda trembled violently.

"Ah! that I know very well, signor: but by what ——"

Here again the thunder interrupted the distracted listener, and she lost the remainder of the sentence.—At length all was once more silent.

"Well, well," said the first, "if that is the case, why we must directly make our road to the west tower: but the devil take me if I know which is the way to it."

"Nor I," exclaimed each of the others, rising.

"Never mind," answered the first: "I'll warrant we will find it."

This

This was enough for Matilda;—she heard no more, but immediately departed towards the stair-case that led to the tower, with an intent to acquaint her brother with the arrival of the unwelcome visitors.—Had she been told, half an hour before, that she could have had the courage to proceed alone at midnight to the west tower,—she would positively have declared it would have been impossible: but now, though a great degree of terror was left, yet the chief part was obliterated in the idea of preserving her brother's life.

She hurried across the hall, but in her agitation, mistook the turning to the stairs, and found herself before the heavy grate-work gates of the chapel. She stopped a moment to fetch breath.—While her eyes were vacantly fixed on the ruins of this ancient place of worship, a faint glimmering seemed to
move

move on one side of the aisles ; and, in about a minute, a figure with a lamp glided along the body of the chapel. This brought Matilda to a recollection of her situation ;—her tottering limbs almost refused their office :—she partly staggered from the gates, and returned to find the opening to the stair-case. This she fortunately found, and began to ascend the narrow stone stairs ; while every few minutes she stopped, and thought she heard a footstep behind her, —then looked back, but all was quiet, except the thunder, which still continued with equal violence. Matilda, faint and breathless, at length arrived at the first landing. Here she halted, and seated herself for a moment under a casement.

The lightning darted through into the opposite apartment, which was that which contained the few implements of
war,

war, and martial instruments, — and showed the gloomy appearance of the room.—One flash greater than the rest illumined the whole space; and, at the same instant, a figure stalked across, and seemed to vanish at the further end. Matilda gave a faint shriek, and hurried up the remainder of the stairs; and, when arrived at the top, burst into the fatal chamber of the west tower, and there perceived her brother sitting alone at the table, his hand on his sword,—his eyes fixed on a particular part of the room, with a wild look of horror and agony,—while his whole frame shook with convulsive terror.

“ Alfred!” exclaimed Matilda, sinking on a chair.

He turned his eyes towards her, and started.

“ Ah!

“ Ah! who and what art thou, that appearest to me in the shape—”

Matilda fell into a fainting fit. — When she recovered, she found her brother standing over her, and administering some wine and water.—His haggard countenance met hers when she opened her eyes; and with a look of distraction he asked her what brought her there.

“ Anxiety for your safety,” answered she,—and immediately related to him, in as few words as possible, the scene she had been witness to, concerning the men who were now in the abbey.

“ Merciful Father!” he exclaimed, “ how much longer shall I be harassed with horror and misfortunes, which follow each other so quickly, that I am not able to extricate myself from one, before
it

it is succeeded by a greater, which seems at once to overwhelm me with ruin and despair?—What am I saying?” continued he: “dare I to question the Almighty,—wretch that I am,—and repine at those adversities he has ordained I should experience?”

“Stand not here,” said Matilda, “but leave this part of the building.—They will, I am afraid, begin to ascend the stair-case before we can get down.—Pray make haste.—If you can but evade them, so as to attain the great stair-case, you may conceal yourself in some of the further apartments beyond our chambers, while they are searching here.”

They now began to descend (Alfred having put out the lamp in the chamber), and fortunately found themselves at the bottom without any interruption,—but heard some voices at the further
end

end of the passage, next the chapel by the great gates.—They stopped not to listen, but immediately ran up the principal stairs.—At the top they discovered Leonard.

“For heaven’s sake, Leonard,” exclaimed both brother and sister, “where have you been?”

“Faith,” returned Leonard, “that I can hardly tell; but, by some means or other, I turned wrong on the stair-case of the west tower when I left my master to come back to my chamber.—It led me into a small passage, and I there found some stone steps.—Thinking that this was only an angle, and that it would lead me to the same spot as if I had continued right, I descended them, but soon found my error, and discovered myself among the ruins of the chapel.—These I crossed, to read a stone which
was

was erected to the memory of the late count.”

This explained to Matilda the figure which she had seen as she was going to her brother; she did not however interrupt him; and Leonard told them that he soon found his way to the hall, but had also heard strange voices, of persons who seemed to be searching the abbey; on which account he had called Agnes, who had greatly alarmed herself and him when they found Matilda was absent.

They were now joined by Agnes, who flew into the arms of her fair friend, who, her imagination had told her, was run away with by the ghosts. — The party now began to proceed towards the further chambers. — Agnes was supported by Leonard, and Matilda by her brother.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WITH solitary and silent steps they crossed several apartments, till they came to the passage which was before described, and which led to the gloomy chamber that, it was supposed, had formerly contained a corpse lying in state. —Matilda dreaded to enter it; she well remembered the appearance of it, when with her brother she examined those rooms.

But there was now no alternative: it ended the suite, and therefore it was the most likely one to conceal them.

After crossing the passage, they arrived at the folding doors:—Matilda and Alfred were foremost: the latter pushed

pushed against them, and they flew open.—The chamber was illuminated.—All started back with astonishment and horror: Agnes faintly screamed; and it was some minutes before they proceeded. At length, however, they advanced, and perceived that the pieces of wax tapers in the black glasses, which they had before observed, were now lighted, and served to show the dismal terrific scene around them.—In every other respect the apartment was exactly the same, nor could the trace of any footstep be discovered. Both were silent: their own reflections were sufficient. Alfred had witnessed so much in the abbey, that he found it impossible to turn off the subject with jest, or even reasoning. Having seated his sister and Agnes, he stood by them with his arms folded, and his eyes fixed on the floor;—Leonard was in the same posture, on the other side.

They

They had not remained in this situation above ten minutes, when a loud clap of thunder rolled over the building.—It was followed by a convulsive shock of nature, which seemed to take effect on the part where they stood; and at that moment the Corinthian capital of a large column greatly decayed fell to the ground with a most tremendous noise.

Both Matilda and Agnes were nearly insensible; Leonard was stupefied with horror, and Alfred distracted. Some moments after, when the latter perceived something raised above the shaft of the pillar, his curiosity led him to go near: he did so, and to his surprise found it was a marble hand, holding a length of silver chain, at the bottom of which was a gold and bloody key.—He called his sister, Agnes, and Leonard, to look at it,—then clasped hold

of it, and disentangled the chain from the hand.—A flash of lightning, and a clap of thunder, again called their attention; when turning from the column, the figure and its lamp again stood before them, lifted up its arms in token of pleasure, and vanished through the floor from their sight.

Agnes screamed and fell into strong hysterics, while Matilda, supported by her brother, fainted away.

It was near an hour before they recovered.—The storm had now in some measure abated: and Alfred, thinking he had heard during the latter part of the time a noise like the closing of the abbey gates, desired Leonard to look first from the great stairs, and then proceed down, and search the lower part of the building.

Leonard

Leonard having left them, Alfred began to give as much consolation as was in his power to Agnes and his sister : but his words faltered, as he attempted to use arguments of comfort, while ideas of misery and distress came too forcibly, to admit the bright and cheering ray of hope.—Leonard returned with the agreeable intelligence that the unwelcome visitors had left the abbey. They therefore, after the lights were put out, made their way to their chambers, and retired ; yet though their harassed minds received, in some degree, the oblivion of sleep, it was of that kind which occasioned tormenting and horrid flights of fancy.

Matilda appeared extremely ill at breakfast ; Alfred produced the key which in so wonderful a manner he had obtained possession of.—They were at a loss to know to what it belonged,

when Matilda recollected the cabinet in her chamber; and, according to the size, it seemed to be designed for that lock.—They deferred, however, trying it, till another opportunity, as they intended visiting father Peter before dinner.—They were soon equipped for their little journey, and proceeded to the cave.

Father Peter was seated at a table, in a melancholy posture. On one side of him was his crucifix, and before him several papers, which he put away immediately as they entered.

Having testified great pleasure at seeing them, the conversation became general, and they found that their supposition was right, concerning his being on a visit to some peasants, when they found him absent from his habitation.

They

They had been in the cave about an hour, when father Peter, while talking with unusual cheerfulness, was suddenly taken ill, and fainted away in Alfred's arms.

Matilda and Agnes administered some cordials which they found near, while Leonard unbuttoned his vest, in order to give him air; when they beheld suspended on his breast an elegant miniature of a lady, set in gold, and adorned with pearls. But how great was Alfred's astonishment, to behold the exact resemblance of lady Caroline Albourne! — No notice was, however, taken: for all except him were too much engaged to observe the likeness.

Father Peter by degrees recovered, and thanked them for their attention. He said he was subject to such fits, and expected to pay the debt of nature, at

the approach of each of them :—“ But, O my God !” he exclaimed, “ spare me a little longer, till a mighty work is effected ; and then I die in peace.”

They now took their leave, and returned to the abbey.—Alfred mentioned his observation on the miniature, and it was the cause of reflections the most uncomfortable and distressing.—The sight of a picture which resembled in so striking a manner the countenance of a beloved object, brought to his memory scenes of happiness he had once hoped to have enjoyed, but which were now, to all human probability, for ever blasted.

The charming lady Caroline he supposed to be hundreds of miles distant : and he considered it as by no means an improbable supposition that she might now be in the arms of another.—He
informed

informed his sister and Leonard that he again intended to watch in the west tower that night; but determinedly refused to accept of even Leonard's attendance in the chamber, that he might be in readiness to conduct her and Agnes to the other part of the abbey, should they again be disturbed by the visitors of the night before.—After dinner, Leonard said he was going to the public market; but Matilda knew this was the usual excuse.—Alfred advised his sister to examine the cabinet after Agnes was asleep: this was agreed on, and he delivered her the key.

Leonard returned in about two hours, and had a private conference with his master. Both seemed much pleased with some information they had received. Supper-time arrived; and after a short repast they retired to their apartments.

Alfred, in about half an hour after, took a lamp, softly left his chamber, and proceeded to that of the west tower.—Agnes was not asleep so soon as usual : she talked of the horrors they had experienced, and trembled for fear of a repetition of them in her dreams. At length, however, she fell under the influence of the heavy god ; and Matilda, with a palpitating heart, applied the gold key to the cabinet, when, after a little difficulty, the folding doors flew open.

It was elegantly adorned with gilt Italian figures of considerable size, in the habits of former times. The first three drawers which Matilda opened, contained coins of gold and silver to a great amount. The sight of the treasure, though it for a moment elevated her, caused, after a little reflection, but small degree of pleasure ; it was none of their property, nor had they any
proof

proof to the right of possessing it.—The fourth and fifth drawers contained jewels, the most beautiful she had ever seen, carefully preserved in gold caskets.—The sixth drawer was full of papers; some of which were letters that had passed between the old count Maserini and his lady, in their youth, before their marriage; and several after, when the count was on business at the court of Spain.—In one of these he mentioned his intention of purchasing Grafville Abbey, and in the next his having done it, and taken possession of the title to that estate. He concluded with hopes that his son Percival Maserini might live to enjoy it after him.—There were a few fragments of memorandums, which formed the contents of the sixth drawer.

In the seventh drawer she found four miniature paintings, elegantly mounted with pearls, gold, and jewels of great

value.—Two of them represented a lady and gentleman in the prime of life, whom Matilda supposed to be the count and his lady; the other two were children, one of whom resembled her own picture of her father: and its companion was, she had little doubt, intended for his sister Sifera Maferini.—The remaining part of the drawer was filled with ornaments for women in former times.

Matilda now drew forth the eighth and last drawer, when the only articles it contained were a piece of ribband, one end of which showed its remainder had been parted by force,—and a small roll of parchment, which was filled with writing, and, though in some measure defaced by time, with some little pains it was easily to be read.—The language was French; but what were Matilda's sensations, when she beheld
her

her father's name at the bottom!—A sudden faintness seized her, and she sunk into an arm chair. A flood of tears, however, fortunately gave relief, and she found herself able to peruse the manuscript, which contained the following words, and showed plainly the distracted state of mind the writer laboured under :—

“ Oh! Father of mercy! where,—where, O my God! is thy thunder, to crush to the earth those who disgrace thy heavenly image? My wife!—my sister!—I see ye,—I clasp ye!—Ah! my soul! they are but figures sent by hell to aid my tormentors, and burst my very heart-strings with grief!

* * *

“ Count D'Ollifont, where are you?—dare me to single combat! use any means but treachery.—Damnable villain!—

lain!—dragged from all my heart held most dear, immured in a horrid confinement, with the dreadful expectation of an ignominious death!

* * *

Clementina! Sifera! where are ye?—Oh, my father! if thou art permitted to look down from thy blessed abode in heaven, on the miseries of thy son,—will not tears, such as angels weep, burst forth, and thy frame, though immortal, receive a shock of horror?

* * *

“My wife! my sister!—I am sick at heart,—appear to me,—give me some comfort within these gloomy walls!—Oh, D'Ollifont! D'Ollifont! thou art planning a horrid deed!—Thou thirstest for my blood!—why not take thy fill at once, and end this life of torture?”

torture?—why shrink?—why stay the murderous dagger from my breast—when thy coward heart must know I am wholly in thy power, unable to resist the tyrannic rod of oppression?

* * *

“ Father Peter! I know I have thy pity:—but thou art entangled in the snares of a wretch, and unable to extricate thyself from the hellish bondage.—Thou knowest all, and thou wilt know my end.—To thee then must I look for reparation. On thee must it depend, to be an instrument of almighty justice, and give blood for blood!

* * *

“ Hark! the tormentors will soon be here; one little hour, and this injured frame is levelled with the dust.—Oh, my God, forgive my enemies,
protect

protect my poor deserted wife, and the offspring of our love, if yet in this world of woe.—My sister too! defend her from the enemies of our house.—All's dark, all's cheerless! must I not have one ray of light to ease the pang of dissolution?—Must no wife, no sister, no friend, nor even charitable stranger, give one sigh or parting look of pity, ere these eyes are closed for ever?—Must none but murderers, grinning at their foul-done deed, receive the quivering last-drawn breath of life?—Poison or daggers is the choice!—It matters not: each tends to the same great end.—Hark! hark! I hear them coming. The bell strikes one! The hour well suits the horrid act.—Almighty Father! thy influence spreads around me,—and rays of blessed hope give warmth to my every faculty.—I am light as air: all misery vanishes: I die with pleasure. Ye murderers, appear!

I am

I am now prepared to receive you, even with ecstasy.—Terror, distress, and horror, are no more.—Hell sinks before me.—The dark and gloomy vapours of despair are dispelled by the glorious light of heaven, and the refulgent beams of a merciful Redeemer!

“ I see,—Oh! my God! my God! I mount;—I fly;—nature itself seems gone. The world's a mass of matter, now to me no more!”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MIDNIGHT TRANSACTIONS.

——— Now o'er one half the world
 Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
 The curtain'd sleep ; now witchcraft celebrates
 Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,
 Alarum'd by his sentinel the wolf,
 Who howls his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
 With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his
 design
 Moves like a ghost.

MACBETH.

“UNFORTUNATE parent ! Heaven will surely avenge thy wrongs : the wrath of the Almighty must at a future time fall on him, who, with fiend-like malice, could plunge the innocent into misery, wretchedness, and despair !”

These

These were the words of Matilda, as she dropped the manuscript from her hands, and burst into a flood of tears. Such affecting mournful complaints, such a picture of horror and distress, would have greatly shocked her, had they proceeded from one not bound to her by the ties of relationship, or even those of friendship: but the idea of a father undergoing those sufferings, contributed greatly to increase that grief and melancholy which she at present experienced.

Having wept for a considerable time, she found herself in some degree recovered. But she was entirely at a loss to know in what manner to act with respect to the information she should give to her brother relative to the manuscript. Matilda well knew his natural warmth of temper would not permit him to use discretion in his inquiries of
father

father Peter; and the strange mysterious behaviour of this man had prevented them from even trusting him with their situation. It was true, the paper she had found spoke well of him: but how easily might her poor father have been deceived by artful professions of friendship to hide the lurking villany of his soul, and make his punctuality to the count's orders appear in less infamous and horrid colours. Now, should this man be still kept by D'Ollifont as a spy upon the abbey, her brother's impetuosity might cause him to throw himself in father Peter's power, without first knowing either his character or inclination to serve them.

Matilda was perfectly convinced these considerations were just, and wished to procure herself an explanation from the hermit: but to visit him alone undiscovered, was an expedient she was entirely ignorant

entirely ignorant how to contrive any means to effect :—yet it was actually necessary father Peter should be consulted, and that immediately.

After some study, a thought struck her, that she might see him at night, after her brother, Leonard, and Agnes, had retired to rest ; but then she shrunk from the idea of walking to the cave at so late an hour. Second reflection, however, seemed to tell her she had nothing to fear ; and that would be the only method she could take to obtain an interview, without the knowledge of any other person. At length she came to a determination to try her project the following night ; and by the time this resolution was formed, daylight darted through the casement of her chamber, and seemed to enliven nature with its cheering rays.

She

She had not yet heard Alfred enter his room: but whenever she had looked towards the west tower, as she had done several times in the course of the night, the light seemed to continue in the same place. This trifling observation gave her some degree of comfort, as she supposed every thing remained quiet.

Some little time after, she heard Alfred open his chamber door, and speak to Leonard. Matilda felt considerable happiness at his safety: and as she was now perfectly satisfied in that respect, she desired Agnes, when she arose, not to wait breakfast for her; as, having received but little rest during the night, she intended now to compose herself to sleep.

She arose at a late hour, and found her brother, Leonard, and Agnes, in the parlour.

parlour. The former was reading ; and though his countenance was extremely pale, yet she thought she could perceive an inward satisfaction and serenity, she had lately been seldom witness to.

Alfred soon requested to speak with her alone, and, with considerable eagerness, asked her if she had found any thing of consequence in the cabinet.—Matilda acquainted him with every article, except the manuscript ; he seemed in some measure disappointed, but showed great pleasure at the idea of the money.

Matilda was rather surpris'd. “ That money, Alfred,” said she, “ we have no right to ; nor do I know, in our situation, that it would be of any material service, were it our own.”

“ We must at all events make free
with

with it, Matilda ; I have the strongest reason to suppose that it does belong to us ; and besides we are now in the greatest want of it."

" How so ?" replied his sister, still more astonished, " You told me the other day we had enough to support us for some time at least."

" True," answered Alfred : " but I have now other uses for wealth ; in short, Matilda, this night has discovered to me circumstances of a most wonderful nature ; and the horrid mystery of this dreadful abbey is at length unravelled. Perhaps we may remain here a short time longer : but I hope you will soon see these gloomy scenes of adversity and sorrow transformed to days and years of tranquillity, happiness, and comfort."

Matilda stood the image of amazement ;

ment; and, for a moment, she thought her brother insane; but the glow of pleasure which overspread his face, confirmed that his words were true; and his features once more appeared the same as when in former times she had seen him, with his own hand, relieve the shivering famished beggar, and, his countenance glowing with compassion and benevolence, watch the poor wretch recover vital warmth and strength from the nourishment he had administered. Matilda caught the heart-felt joy; but on her it took a different effect, and she burst into tears. Nor was Agnes's joy less, when she was informed of the good intelligence. She wept with pleasure at the idea of leaving the abbey, and still remaining with her dear young lady.

The good old Leonard too was seen to wipe his eyes, and heave a sigh of ecstasy

ecstasy at this unexpected turn of fortune.

Alfred, however, would give no satisfactory answer to their inquiries concerning what he had seen in the west tower: he only told them that the abbey must be still their habitation for a short period; but the time would pass away with far more comfort than it had hitherto done.

Dinner-time arrived: but the intelligence had cloyed every appetite; and it was removed almost without being tasted. Alfred, about half an hour after, left the abbey, and said he should return towards evening.

Matilda had now time to consider whether, after what she had heard, it would be proper to conceal the manuscript from her brother; and, though many reasons prompted her to give it
to

to him immediately, yet a little reflection told her that the same ill consequence she had before conceived, might arise from it. He might not yet be acquainted with the sufferings of his father, nor with the knowledge the hermit had of his distress and death. In short, she resolved to act as she had before determined, and pay father Peter a visit at midnight. But she wished not to leave Agnes without speaking: an excuse might serve, that she had left some books in the parlour, which she wished to look over, and which might detain her some time to procure.

Alfred returned at the time he mentioned, and informed them he did not intend to watch in the tower that night. The evening was spent with some degree of comfort, and at an early hour they retired to rest. Agnes was soon asleep, and Matilda read till near midnight.

During that time she often looked at the casement of the west tower; but no light nor figure appeared. Having awaked Agnes, she informed her she was going to look for a book she had left in the parlour. Agnes did not by any means like the idea of being left alone in the chamber: but Matilda reminded her that her brother and Leonard were within call, in the next room; but she requested her to make no noise without there was actually a necessity. — She waited a little time, and had the pleasure to find Agnes asleep before she left the apartment.

Matilda took the lamp, and having softly descended the great stairs, proceeded through the hall, and from that to the first court, which soon brought her to the outer one.

She now began to tremble and feel
4 her

her situation. To be entirely alone at such an hour of the night, was an idea in many respects terrific. The pale and half-obscur'd moon gave but an imperfect light; and that light was often eclipsed by dark heavy clouds, which seem'd to rise from the south, and form a gloomy mountain of dark mist towards the west; while vivid flashes of lightning darted from the horizon, and illumined the gathered clouds on the south with uncommon strength.

Matilda view'd the awful scene with emotion, and was several times going to turn back; but she chid herself for want of fortitude, and attempted to laugh at those fears, which now almost prevented her from supporting herself.

She had, however, arriv'd nearly half way to the cave, when a sound of human voices struck her ear at some distance.

Matilda listened,—thought it might only be a soft breeze which waved the thick groves of cypress that surrounded her. But she heard it again, and was convinced she was right: it seemed like a chorus, or the chanting of a funeral hymn for the soul of a deceased person.

She stopped, and leaning against a broken pedestal, which had formerly borne a statue, listened with some degree of pleasure to the solemn dirge. But the voices seemed now to approach much nearer; and she perceived a glare of light at some distance above the foliage, which informed her the persons whom she had heard were near. Terror at being discovered, now overcame every other consideration, and with eager eye she scrutinised each side of the grove, to find a place of concealment. At length she fortunately found a small opening in one part, which, by putting back the boughs, with

with some little trouble, admitted and closed her from view. She now conceived herself to be safe from observation, though there was a part through which she could plainly discover whatever passed on the other side.

Five minutes did not elapse before a procession of men entered the path, still singing in the same solemn manner. A priest of holy orders proceeded first; but how greatly was she astonished, to see him followed by about twelve men, who had every appearance of banditti in dress and figure! The first six carried torches; the other half followed after, with slow and melancholy steps. These were succeeded by six more, bearing a coffin on their shoulders, which was covered with a black velvet pall, and adorned with trophies.

Matilda could hardly suppose herself

awake; yet by the pale moon every figure seemed perfect, and she thought she could, in the faces of the last four, discover the visitors to the abbey on a former night. The whole company halted at the pedestal, when, to the amazement of Matilda, two of them removed a large stone, which formed the cap, and part of a Corinthian base. The pedestal then parted, and was let down, which discovered the entrance to a large vault. The funeral service was then read by the priest who walked first, after which the coffin was carried down by four of the bearers. Another dirge was then sung, and the pedestal was closed, the cap, &c. being replaced. The procession having turned, proceeded back in the same manner, till she lost sight of them at the extremity of the grove.

Though elated at the idea of having
escaped

escaped discovery, she felt considerable awe at the solemn scene. In short, the sight of this midnight funeral, added to the strange dresses of the mourners, impressed on her mind a degree of horror which she was unable to overcome. Having left her secret place of retirement, she passed hastily the strange sepulchre, and with hurried and trembling steps, breathless with agitation, arrived at the cave of father Peter. His lamp was burning, and at a distance she could perceive him at his midnight devotions. His aged reverend figure was in the same posture as when they first discovered him; and his crucifix, books, and hour-glass, as usual, stood before him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MATILDA stopped a few moments to recollect herself, before she discovered to the inhabitant of this recluse cell his midnight visitor. But while she was contemplating his aged form, bent on the earth, his hands clasped, and eyes lifted towards heaven with a fervency of devotion she had hardly ever observed, ideas struck her that by no means contributed to inspire that fortitude she so much wished at this critical hour to possess.

That very figure she now so much admired, nay almost revered and loved, might have been an assistant in taking away the life of her father!—and those very hands which she saw extended in the pious action of prayer, might have inflicted tortures on her parent!

“ Horrid

“Horrid ideas!—uncharitable consideration!” exclaimed a voice which seemed to pass by her, in a whisper.

Matilda started at the rebuke: but she had not even breathed her thoughts: she was therefore certain it must be something more than mortal. Heaven itself had chid her for the supposition.

Trembling at the thought, she supported herself against the side of the cave, and stood an object of distress and terror.—At length, being in some degree recovered, she stepped forward, and gasping with anxiety, appeared before the astonished hermit. His surprise may be well conceived; and with accents of astonishment, nor by any means free from horror, he asked her business at this unusual hour. Matilda had now partly recovered her scattered senses, and with a dignity and fortitude of air peculiar to

herself, requested his pardon for disturbing him at his devotions, and then begged him to listen with attention to a few circumstances she had to relate.

Father Peter looked at her with a piercing eye.—Both being seated, and the hermit having trimmed his lamp, Matilda thus addressed him :

“ Picture to yourself, father, a daughter, who never experienced the embrace of paternal love, but who was yet taught to revere the name of a parent, though her eyes were never blessed with one glance of rapture on his countenance.

“ Brought up with all the tenderness a fond mother can conceive for her fatherless children, — their unprotected state still more endearing them to her maternal bosom,—she feels but little the loss she had sustained, in the comfort
and

and happiness of this remaining tie of duty and parental affection. Now then," continued Matilda, bursting into tears, "change this scene of earthly bliss, and observe her on the couch of sickness, clasping the hand of her child with looks—Oh! merciful God! such looks as I cannot describe, nor you conceive!"

She turned towards her aged auditor: the drops of sympathy trickled down his faded cheeks, while he begged her to be composed, and continue her narrative.

"Her countenance, raised towards heaven, brightened at the very thought of those glorious realms; and a christian's expectation beamed in her eye; yet when she turned towards her daughter, tears would again burst forth, and she would clasp to her heaving breast the weeping child, as if afraid to leave her in a world, encircled with horrid guilt
and

and eternal destruction. She doubted not the goodness of her God; her faith was great, but yet her feelings could not be subdued. She died; and if a good life procures a place of grace, — wafted by heavenly angels, she reached the bosom of a merciful Redeemer.

“ Now, father, behold the clouds of adversity gathering over the heads of her offspring; the brother petitions a noble relation of his mother to receive a sister to his care, for no pecuniary advantage, but to shield her from insults to which her age and sex, added to the unprotected state she was left in, every day subjected her. The only answer they obtain is a direct denial from an artful priest, who by his perfidious arguments had poisoned his patron’s mind against the children of a daughter whom he had before forsaken when he had no adviser but a bad heart.

“ They

“ They leave their native country, to accept the invitation of a distant relation in a foreign clime, where an asylum was yet hoped to be gained for the female wanderer, while her brother fought against the enemies of his country. Arrived at the principal city of England, they are plunged into dissipation, surrounded by temptation, and forsaken by those who should have protected them against oppression.—Picture to yourself a villain, a dastardly villain, taking advantage of the neglect shown to the female relation of his friend, and at a moment when he thought himself free from molestation, employing even force to crush her to the earth, and blast her future days with shame and sorrow never to be erased.—Her brother, witness to the sufferings and usage of a sister, who, he knew, had no other friend to guard her from a wretch unworthy to bear the image of his Creator, seizes the villain, who

who attempts to take his life; but the rash, though excusable, injured youth strikes him to the ground, weltering in his blood, and momentarily expecting to pay that debt to nature, at the receipt of which he had nothing to hope, but much to fear. They fly from the laws of England, return to their native land, shrinking from notice, fearful that the power of their oppressor may overtake them even there. Another heavy misfortune now surrounds them: through the cursed contrivance of their enemies, the young officer is proved a deserter by not attending to an order which was sent to him the night he left London, and of which consequently he was entirely ignorant. By the death of him whom he had wounded, it is rendered impossible for him to clear himself of this stigma. Concealed in a desolate habitation, they discover the murder,—ah! and the murderer, of their father.”

Matilda

Matilda turned towards the hermit. His colour changed, and he gazed at her with silent awe and astonishment.

She continued—"Yet a witness must be found to authenticate the horrid deed, and give justice to the children of the deceased."

"And is such a person living?" asked father Peter.

"He is," returned Matilda.—
"Were you in his situation, would you not promote that justice which God and nature require? or would you still screen the wretch, and suffer the innocent victims of his cruelty to languish in distress and affliction?"

"Surely you cannot doubt my answer," said the hermit. "I would even
part

part with life itself to procure justice for the sufferers you mention."

"There is no need of such a sacrifice;" answered Matilda. "But now, father, I put your virtue to the trial. I come to demand reparation for the murder of a father, and that father the rightful heir of Orlando count Maferini."

Father Peter, though in a great degree astonished, was not actually so surprised as might have been expected. He asked an explanation.

"The account is brief. — In short, Percival Maferini was a prisoner in yonder abbey: you pitied him, yet were privy to the deed."

Father Peter seemed at a loss to reply. At length he told her that at an
early

early hour he would wait on her at the abbey.

“ You know my residence, then ? ” said Matilda.

“ Perfectly, ” answered he. “ Believe me, you shall have no cause to repent this visit; and give me leave to foretel that the brightest scenes of happiness, with the Almighty’s permission, now await you. ”

“ There is comfort in your words, father, ” answered Matilda: “ Heaven send they may prove true! But the clouds of adversity have so long eclipsed the cheering rays of hope, that I hardly feel myself able to admit them to my breast. ”

Father Peter wished to see Matilda to the abbey-gates; but she positively refused his offer, and parted with him at the entrance of the cave.

The

The idea of the funeral again entered her imagination; and she felt a kind of dread at passing the sepulchre, which almost made her repent that she had refused the good old man's attendance.

When she had arrived within a few yards of it, she perceived a glare of light which seemed to spread around the part, and soon observed several torches, the same as she had before seen, stuck in the ground: the pedestal was also parted, and laid on the earth.

Matilda's agitation and surprise were greater than before; and she stopped, unable to resolve whether to pass quickly by, or remain where she was. While in this state of suspense, she saw two men ascend from the vault, followed by a third whose figure excited in her still greater astonishment. He was elegantly formed, and his clothes were entirely of the English fashion, but seemed strangely put

on: his hair was dishevelled, and his whole frame greatly disordered.

After some little time they closed the pedestal, and taking up the torches, took that path which immediately led to the abbey.

Matilda was again at a loss in what manner to act; but followed them, though at a distance, with slow and cautious steps. At length she traced them to the gates of the abbey. Here they halted; and Matilda, with a palpitating heart, stopped to observe their motions.

They continued in conversation some little time, when, to her amazement, they opened the outer gates, and entered.

Matilda, still more alarmed, proceeded on, and ventured to pass into the first court; she here perceived no one; but
having

having entered the hall, she thought she heard voices in the parlour. Nor was her conjecture wrong: for having half ascended the great stairs, she listened for a moment, and heard a conversation carried on, though in a very low tone: she however could plainly discover the speech of Leonard and her brother; her fears therefore of a discovery being at an end, her curiosity did not prompt her to stay any longer, being much fatigued, and in want of rest. She therefore directly proceeded to her chamber, and was happy to find Agnes still under the influence of the sleepy god.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

*R. Noble,
in the Old Bailey.*



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